

THE HOHENZOLLERNS

A HISTORICAL STUDY

BY A. D. INNES

AUTHOR OF "A HISTORY OF THE BRITISH NATION," "A GENERAL SKETCH OF POLITICAL HISTORY," &c.



*Oh, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength ; but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant.*



LONDON: T. C. & E. C. JACK
67 LONG ACRE, W.C., AND EDINBURGH
NEW YORK: DODGE PUBLISHING CO.

V55:58217-11/14

E. S.

12584

1915- date of publication.

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THE HOHENZOLLERNS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

ON April 18th, 1417, Frederick of Hohenzollern, Burgrave of Nüremberg, was invested by the Emperor Sigismund with the title and dignities of Elector of Brandenburg. On January 18th, 1701, Frederick III, Elector of Brandenburg, was crowned King of Prussia. On January 18th, 1871, William I, King of Prussia, was proclaimed German Emperor. In 1914, his grandson William II, King of Prussia and German Kaiser, endeavoured to assert a claim, not recognised by other European powers, to a still more extended dominion, attainable only by the total destruction of the power of France, of the British Empire, and of Russia. It appears improbable at the present time that those nations will be reduced to acquiescence. It also appears that an appreciable curtailment of the powers of the house of Hohenzollern will be the inevitable and fortunate alternative.

The Brandenburg Electorate was bestowed upon a capable noble of the Holy Roman Empire whose advancement was thoroughly justified by his many admirable qualities. The crown of Prussia was assumed by or granted to a prince of no great merit who succeeded to the Electorate at the moment when his father had raised Brandenburg from the position of insignificance in which he had found it to that of a Power not indeed of the first class but at least very far from

negligible. Frederick II, the grandson of Frederick I, by his own genius and by the instrumentality of the army which his father had created, established Prussia as a first-class Power and the rival of Austria for the leadership of Germany. A hundred years later, William I, not by his own genius but by that of the mighty minister to whom he gave his confidence, Otto von Bismarck, and by the instrumentality of the army directed by Moltke, disposed of the Habsburg rivalry for the leadership of Germany, and by his victories over Austria and France established Germany as the greatest military power in Europe. His grandson William II discarded Bismarck, and developed the policy aiming at world dominion of which the issue is now being fought out on the battlefields of Europe.

Frederick William, "the Great Elector," who reigned from 1640 to 1687, was the first Hohenzollern who acquired international consequence. His grandson, Frederick William I, the second King of Prussia, was a prince of very remarkable personality who made possible the achievements of his son and successor, Frederick "the Great," achievements which justify that complimentary title. Frederick left no sons to succeed him. Of the three kings who followed him, each one proved quite emphatically that he was by no means a great man. The fourth, William I, was neither a far-seeing statesman nor an incomparable soldier; but greatness was thrust upon him by the statesman and the soldier by whom he was great enough to allow himself to be guided. All men are agreed that the elements of greatness were nobly combined in his son Kaiser Frederick I; but he was suffered to reign only for a few months. To the greatness of Frederick's son, let Belgium be called as witness.

But let this be said of the house of Hohenzollern. In the seventeenth century it raised an insignificant state to a position of consequence. In the eighteenth century it transformed a minor Power—partly, indeed, by sheer aggression, but partly by a quite magnificent resistance to overwhelming odds—into a first-class

Power. In the nineteenth century, a Hohenzollern gave to Germany a unity which a thousand years of the Holy Roman Empire had utterly failed to give her ; since, unsupported by the crown, Bismarck and Moltke would have wrought in vain. The three Hohenzollern princes who have been called "Great," succeeded because each pursued a truly national policy, but none attempted to transgress its limits—the limits which were too narrow for German ambitions in the twentieth century. None of them was overburdened with scrupulosity, but each had moral standards to which he adhered. The Great Elector twice refused the crown of Poland, because he regarded it as a political necessity that the king should be a Catholic. Frederick II, with a somewhat cynical frankness professed and practised the principle that treaties should be broken if the security of the State demanded it, but he did not claim that security and convenience were equivalent terms. William allowed Bismarck to be the keeper of his political conscience ; and whatever Bismarck did was done with some excuse which carried with it at least a show of moral plausibility sufficient to satisfy if not positively to convince his master. None of them ever found it necessary to resort to pure invention in order to provide something which might pass as a justification for palpably indefensible action.

Professorial Germany appears to labour under the conviction that in Germany and primarily in Prussia is to be found the motive power for the advancement of civilisation. In reviewing the history of the Hohenzollerns, it is curiously difficult to discover any single respect in which European progress is indebted to Prussian sources. Among the other nations, Britain perhaps owed a debt to Frederick the Great because, in the Seven Years' War, France divided her energies and wasted her troops in fighting the King of Prussia instead of confining herself exclusively to the struggle with England. But Frederick was fighting, not for the sake of his Ally, nor even for the European balance of Power, but to save Prussia from annihilation. He was

fighting not for any general cause but exclusively for his own kingdom. Whether anyone outside of Prussia was the better for his success may be questioned. Only at a single epoch in our history—from the moment when Yorck in effect raised the standard of Prussian revolt against the Napoleonic domination at the close of 1812, to the moment when Blücher's arrival on the field of Waterloo sealed the doom of Napoleon—did Prussia play a heroic part in a common cause. And even then, the lead was not given by the Hohenzollern, who was swept somewhat reluctantly along the tide of irresistible popular feeling. There have been fervent and distinguished patriots among the Hohenzollern princes. Hohenzollern princes have even extended their patriotism to Germany at large. They have served Prussia, they have served Germany—not always to Germany's benefit. But not one of them has ever attempted to serve Europe.

CHAPTER II

THE FOUNDING OF PRUSSIA

§ 1. *The Early Hohenzollerns*

THE Mark or March of Brandenburg was primarily a military colony or outpost planted by the German emperors on the north-east of the Empire to control and hold back the Slavs between the Elbe and the Oder. In course of time, the whole region ruled by the margraves, "marcher earls" as they would have been called in England, became thoroughly Germanised. The margraves were persons of considerable importance. But the old Ascanian line became extinct in the fourteenth century. Anarchy followed; and at the time of the Council of Constance (a year or two after Agincourt), the Emperor Sigismund conferred the Mark of Brandenburg upon his friend and supporter Frederick of Hohenzollern, Burgrave of Nüremberg. With the margravate went the electoral dignity; the margrave

that is was one of the seven princes, three ecclesiastical, with whom lay the election of the German Emperor, the head of the Holy Roman Empire. The other lay electors were the Elector of Saxony, the Elector Palatine, and the King of Bohemia ; others were added at later dates.

We may content ourselves with a slight sketch of the Hohenzollern history during the ensuing two hundred years. The first princes were men of mark, who restored order in their new dominions and established their authority in regions where it was in dispute. The Brandenburg marches were an inland territory ; but a claim was made good upon Pomerania lying between Brandenburg and the Baltic. During the fifteenth century the Hohenzollern dominions were divided between the electoral and the Franconian branches of the house. In the sixteenth century both branches took the Protestant side. But while the Brandenburgers devoted themselves mainly, and with commendable success, to internal administration, the Franconians were acquiring considerable if scattered portions of territory : a title through marriage to the Cleves succession in the Rhine land ; the Jägerndorf estates in Silesia, by purchase ; and the dukedom of East Prussia which did not form part of the Empire, but was under the sovereignty of the King of Poland. Both East and West Prussia had belonged to the order of the Teutonic knights ; but only East Prussia was included in the new dukedom of Albert of Hohenzollern, who had been Grandmaster of the Order.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Franconian line died out, and all its possessions passed to the elder Electoral or Brandenburg branch of the house ; whereby the elector, Joachim Frederick, became lord not only of Brandenburg with Pomerania, but also of Cleves and Jülich in the west, of Franconia, of a portion of Silesia, and of East Prussia. The Elector, however, handed over Franconia to his half brothers, and separated the Silesian estate from the rest of the inheritance by bestowing it upon his own

second son, John George. Moreover, the Habsburg emperors were now deserting their former tolerant attitude in religious questions, and becoming aggressively Catholic. It did not at all suit them that a pronouncedly Protestant house should hold such extensive territories in the north of Germany, and they denounced the Brandenburg succession in Cleves and Jülich. The expansion of Brandenburg was postponed.

In 1618 when John Sigismund, the eldest son and successor of John Frederick, was Elector of Brandenburg, the Thirty Years' War broke out; springing from the attempt of the Elector Palatine, son-in-law of our James I, to assume the crown of Bohemia, which was claimed as his own by Ferdinand of Carinthia, the heir to the crown imperial. In the same year the vigorous and capable John Sigismund died, and was succeeded by the limp and incapable George William.

The part played in the Thirty Years' War by George William was generally ignominious. His uncle, John George of Jägerndorf in Silesia, boldly flung himself into the Protestant cause, was put to the bann of the Empire, and had his Silesian estates forfeited for his pains. But George William was a Calvinist with a Catholic minister and subjects who for the most part were Lutheran. The Lutherans and Calvinists of Germany were each as hot against the other as either of them against Catholicism. They failed to sink their differences and present a united front against Catholic aggression, and George William suffered from the illusion that he would bring least trouble upon himself by a persistent neutrality—a similar illusion to that from which his descendants suffered in the Napoleonic wars. George William ruled over wider dominions perhaps than any other Protestant prince in Germany; obviously it would have been his proper function to take the lead in fighting for the cause of Protestantism. But like some of his neighbours he either could not or would not see that Protestantism was at stake; so he tried to shirk his responsibilities, and only found him-

self buffeted by both sides in consequence. Even when the Swedish hero Gustavus Adolphus came to give German Protestants the leading of which they were so sorely in need, George William hung back till Gustavus frightened him into a more active frame of mind. His pusillanimity had not prevented the emperor from seizing Pomerania, which was now duly mastered by Gustavus, and George William did not win it back by his reluctant and half-hearted support of the Protestant cause.

Gustavus fell at Lützen ; the devastating war went on, Swedes, French, and every variety of German prince playing every man for his own hand, the Germans for the most part not too intelligently. George William never did anything positive and departed from the unholy scene in 1640. Happily for Brandenburg, the son who succeeded him, being then twenty years old, was a man of a very different type.

§ 2. *The Great Elector*

George William had not only failed to play his part as a leader of German Protestantism ; he had failed also to save his own dominions from falling to ruin. Young Frederick William was quick to see that he could do nothing whatever until he had set his own house in order. Dexterity, not unaided by good fortune, freed him from Schwarzenberg, his father's Catholic and Imperialist minister. Diplomacy released him from the Swedish pressure. He began to organise a small but efficient army. He effected a compromise regarding the Cleves succession with the rival house of Neuburg, by which he secured for himself the actual duchy of Cleves and the county of Mark. But when the Thirty Years' War was at last brought to a conclusion in 1648 by the series of treaties known as the peace of Westphalia, he failed to persuade the Emperor to restore the Silesian province of Jägerndorf, forfeited from his great-uncle, and he was forced to submit to Sweden's demand that she should retain western Pomerania—

the most valuable part of it from the point of view of the prince, who understood the value of a seaboard. He was compensated, inadequately in his own opinion, by the secularised sees of Halberstadt, Minden, and Magdeburg. The Elector had learnt something from Holland where a part of his youth had been spent. He afterwards offered to the Swedes the three sees, and a handsome sum of money in addition, in exchange for Swedish Pomerania ; but the offer was not accepted.

Before the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War, it was exceedingly doubtful whether Brandenburg would be able to recover hold of any material portion of the Cleves inheritance. Pomerania also was virtually independent, though under the Elector's suzerainty. The Peace of Westphalia, therefore, did in effect very materially increase the territories under the Elector's effective control. His next great object was to release the duchy of Prussia from its subjection to the Polish sovereignty. Poland and Sweden were very soon at odds. Frederick William could hardly avoid participating in the quarrel, but in doing so he was guided exclusively by his own interests, which forced him at first to side with the Swedes. But it appeared that more advantageous terms might be extracted from Poland. Frederick William found sufficient excuse for changing sides. He was rewarded by procuring a treaty releasing the duchy of Prussia from its Polish allegiance in 1657 ; and was now able to devote his energies to establishing a degree of homogeneity and solidarity in his scattered dominion, Brandenburg, East Prussia and the Rhenish territory.

It may be remarked in passing that while Frederick William was supporting the Swedes he had given surprising proof of the efficiency of the small state army which he had organised, and of his own competence in the field, by the leading share which he took in a great defeat of a large Polish force by a much smaller body of Swedes and Brandenburgers.

In every State on the Continent, large or small, with the exceptions only of Holland and Switzerland, the

seventeenth century saw the princes endeavouring to centralise the whole power of the State in their own hands, Louis XIV in France being the grand exemplar ; although across the Channel even the arch-dissimulator, Charles II, failed to establish the supremacy of the Crown over Parliament. To no one was a personal supremacy more necessary than to Frederick William, because the union between Cleves, Brandenburg and Prussia was entirely personal. The three regions differed in their political traditions even more than England, Scotland and Ireland ; and they were divided, as the nations of the British Isles were not, by intervening territories which prevented fusion through direct contact. In Prussia especially, with its ultra-feudal traditions and its connection with Poland, the idea of obedience to a central authority, as a necessity of state, was not easy to implant. Yet the mingled firmness and dexterity of the Elector induced the Prussian Estates, after a prolonged opposition, to define the relations between themselves and the sovereign duke in terms more favourable to the Elector's authority than he had ventured to hope.

But if Frederick William was to attain the position of a prince who could hold his own independently against such neighbours as Sweden, Denmark and Poland—the reasonable ambition which he set before himself—the seat of his power would have to be Brandenburg, and it was absolutely essential that he should have an effective standing army ; while, incidentally, a standing army controlled by the sovereign is an effective instrument for ensuring his personal supremacy. Brandenburg, on the contrary, could not see why a standing army was wanted, now that Germany was no longer at war either internally or externally. The Elector, however, not only succeeded in obtaining subsidies for the purpose, but was able to adopt new methods of taxation—indirect in place of direct—which increased the revenue and were at the same time felt as less burdensome ; while they created an antagonism between the Estates themselves entirely advantageous to the power

of the sovereign and detrimental to that of the nobles.

Frederick William had no predilection for war. But under the conditions produced by the Thirty Years' War he, as a sincere Protestant, saw that German Protestantism must be able to hold its own against Catholic aggression. In that devastating struggle it had only just held its own through the intervention of two foreign Powers, Sweden and France. As a German he found dependence upon either Sweden or France to be intolerable ; as a Brandenburger he found Sweden's position in Pomerania particularly intolerable. If German Protestantism was to rid itself of French or Swedish domination, the German Protestant states must be sufficiently strong from a military point of view to be capable of offering adequate resistance to aggression. That could only be effected if Brandenburg were herself strong enough to give a would-be aggressor pause. If Catholic Germany should cease entirely to threaten the liberty of Protestant Germany, Germany could agree in delivering itself from French and Swedish domination. No dream so extravagant as that of a Hohenzollern ascendency in Germany presented itself to the mind of the Great Elector ; but we have here the entirely legitimate conceptions which after two hundred years were to have an entirely illegitimate expansion.

If Brandenburg was ever to be anything more than a petty principality, eternally compelled to submit to the behests of more powerful neighbours, she must organise herself, and develop her military resources, seizing every opportunity which could be regarded as legitimate for expanding her territories. If she was to be a power that really counted in Germany, she must be a military State. Unless she attained to that position, Germany could not be freed from the grip of France and Sweden ; if she attained to that position, the Catholic and Protestant powers in Germany could act in concert, because the Catholic powers would cease to hanker for the subjection of the Protestant powers when an enterprise in that direction was palpably impracticable. In brief,

Protestantism, State patriotism, and German patriotism, all pointed to the same conclusion, that Brandenburg must be organised as an efficient State with a powerful army on a sound economic basis of financial prosperity.

In seeking these objects, the methods of the Great Elector were certainly not one whit more unscrupulous than those of any other statesman of the time. To a great extent he achieved his ends; not altogether, because he was compelled to resign the fruit of the military achievements which ought to have secured them. Not his aggression but that of Sweden brought about the Pomeranian campaign of 1675 which was crowned by the brilliant victory of Frederick William at Fehrbellin. Not less brilliant was his New Year campaign in 1679, also against the Swedes, this time in East Prussia; when he carried his forces over ice-bound water and land, and drove the enemy in headlong flight. But the Swedes had been acting as the allies of Louis XIV. Louis had just made peace at the Treaty of Nimeguen with the coalition against which he had been fighting. He stood by his allies and signified to the Great Elector that he was not yet to be permitted to enforce what the Swedes could no longer have refused him. Frederick William, standing by himself, was obliged to submit to the French king's terms and to leave the Swedes in Pomerania.

The Elector considered, justly enough, that the Emperor had on this occasion deserted him. He was presently to become the victim of another Imperial trick—though he himself never knew it—a trick for which Frederick II was one day to exact the penalty, not too scrupulously. The Elector had, as we have seen, a claim, derived from his great-uncle, upon the Jägerndorf territory in Silesia which the Emperor had sequestered. In 1685, he was able to put forward a claim to Liegnitz, also in Silesia, in accordance with a bargain of questionable legality which had been struck between the houses of Liegnitz and Brandenburg 150 years before. The Habsburgs repudiated all the Hohenzollern claims in Silesia. Presently, however, they suggested a com-

promise by which they offered the small Schwiebus district as a solatium for the withdrawal of all the Brandenburg claims. But behind the Elector's back, they beguiled the Crown Prince Frederick into giving a written promise that on his accession he would restore Schwiebus, a promise of which the Elector was kept in ignorance. Frederick William was old enough, and tired enough, to accept the bargain.

In 1688 he died. "Not an unjust man, by any means," says Carlyle, "nor, on the other hand, by any means thin-skinned in his interpretings of justice: Fair Play to myself always; or occasionally even the Height of Fair Play! On the whole by constant energy, vigilance, adroit activity, by an ever ready insight and audacity to seize the passing fact by its right hand, he fought his way well in the world; left Brandenburg a flourishing and greatly increased country, and his own name famous enough."

§ 3. *The First King of Prussia*

Frederick his successor, the twelfth of the Hohenzollern electors, was a character by no means so notable; distinguished chiefly by the fact that he was the first of the Hohenzollerns to wear the royal crown. On his accession to the Electorate, he soon found out how the Austrians had tricked him; but he kept his word and restored Schwiebus, though he declared that in doing so he was cancelling also the paternal undertaking to withdraw the other Silesian claims. He was not remarkable for statesmanship and did not increase the power of Brandenburg; though he played his part not discreditably as the head of a small state in the complicated politics of the time. His financial methods were well-intentioned but amateurish and unsuccessful, and his expenditure on pomps and dignities was particularly extravagant. His army was well maintained and his troops fought with distinction, though with little enough profit to Brandenburg.

His great ambition, the raising of his house to kingly

rank, was accomplished in 1701. As sovereign Duke of Prussia, where he had no suzerain, he considered himself entitled to assume the royal dignity ; but something more was required to give the royal status in the courts of Europe ; he required the recognition of the Emperor. This he secured, in return for the promise, in 1700, to support the full Habsburg claim to the succession of the Spanish dominion, in resistance to the partition treaties between Louis XIV and William of Orange which were made in the interests of the Balance of Power. He got his price for the promise, and on January 18th, 1701, was crowned Frederick I, King of Prussia.

Frederick I was receiving his crown just at the moment when Louis XIV was tearing up partition treaties and affirming the claim of his grandson Philip to the whole inheritance of the Spanish Habsburgs. William III of England spent most of the year 1701 in drawing together a fresh coalition, the Grand Alliance, in order to compel Louis to accept another compromise compatible with the doctrine of the Balance of Power. William died in March 1702, with the Grand Alliance just completed. We have here no concern with the War of the Spanish Succession, except to note that Frederick's Prussian troops rendered admirable service to the Allies ; greatly distinguishing themselves at Blenheim on the right wing under the command of Prince Eugene, and again in the desperate fighting at Malplaquet. The war was practically synchronous with Frederick's reign ; for he died in 1713 just before the signing of the treaty of Utrecht, by which the war was brought to a conclusion. A well-meaning man, honest and kindly, loyal to his word, careful of his subjects' welfare, but quite without the astuteness which has characterised so many members of his family.

§ 4. *Frederick William I*

An immense advance in the development of the Prussian kingdom was made by Frederick's son and

successor, Frederick William I; perhaps the most unconventional monarch who ever occupied a throne. As Crown Prince he had arrived at certain very emphatic conclusions: the extravagance of the court was ridiculous; diplomacy is childish in a world where nothing really counts but the power of the sword; no expenditure upon the army of the State can be too great; expenditure upon anything else is almost inexcusable; unqualified obedience is the virtue of everyone except the king who must be obeyed; the virtue of the king is unremitting zeal in the pursuit of power for the State. Assuredly he was most amply endowed with the "will to power" which the latter day creed of Prussia tells us is the essential quality of the "superman."

But at that point Frederick William stopped short. Though he demanded power for the State he did not demand dominion for it. He devoted his entire life to the supreme object of creating the most powerful Army, the biggest, the most perfect in every detail, which could by any sort of possibility be constituted out of the material, human and other, available in his kingdom; supplemented so far as practicable by material, human and other, absorbed from elsewhere. But he never made any attempt to test the mighty instrument he had welded for purposes of aggression. To the king it would seem as if the army itself became the end-in-itself; a thing to be created and perfected not as a means to other achievement, but simply for its own sake. His view that statesmen weigh the value of allies in terms of their military strength, doubtless had a substantial foundation in fact, but as a guiding principle it required modification. The statesman is apt to enquire whether the strength of an army is a practically available asset. European politicians did not as a matter of fact trouble themselves greatly to secure the friendship of Frederick William, because he gave no practical demonstration of the army's effective value; matters went very differently when his son startled the world by treating that wonderful organisation as an instrument for achieving dominion.

In the course of a reign which lasted for twenty-seven years the King of Prussia built up an army numerically greater than England had ever possessed, even in the era of her greatest military expansion when Marlborough was fighting in the Netherlands and Peterborough in Spain. France and Austria had larger armies, but no one else ; and yet the population of the Prussian kingdom at the time is estimated at no more than 2,500,000. Prussian militarism—the habit of mind which consciously or unconsciously looks upon the State as existing for the glorification of the army instead of the army as existing for the defence of the State—came into being in the reign of the Supreme Drill Sergeant.

But Prussian militarism under the drill sergeant appeared to Europe rather in the light of a harmless craze, a quaint monstrosity, than a thing to be seriously reckoned with. And in fact Prussian militarism did not become a European danger until the rulers of Prussia expanded the militarist creed. If Frederick William considered that the State existed for the Army, he did not advance to the doctrine that the army existed for aggression. His son never made the initial blunder ; his Army existed to serve the State. It was reserved for later generations to formulate the twentieth century doctrine that “the State exists for the Army, and the Army exists for aggression.”

Frederick William did not create a conscript army ; he did not, that is, impose universal military service. But he required every district to provide its quota of men, and besides these he raised regiments by voluntary enlistment or enlistment supposed to be voluntary, though the methods of the recruiting sergeants were apt to have more coercion than persuasion about them. The king’s craze for tall men led to the creation of the notorious Potsdam regiment of giants, for whom he sought, and whom he kidnapped, in every region where particularly big men were supposed to grow. The troops were officered from the landed gentry, the aristocratic class, so that the territorial troops

were not much more than a modification of the old feudal levies of landholders with a following of their own peasantry. Discipline was of the most rigid character ; the perfection of drill was demanded ; each regiment was a highly perfected machine. The soldier was taught to be proud of his uniform and to claim recognition as the superior of the civilian. But at the same time the king was zealous to introduce material aids to efficiency ; the adoption of the iron ramrod was found by his son to have doubled the rapidity of fire of the Prussian troops.

Thoroughness was Frederick William's passion. He wanted to make his army the best fighting machine in Europe. Art and literature he held in supreme contempt, but somehow he had picked up from Xenophon the one fragment of ancient learning which struck him as practical enough to be worth remembering—that his Persian hero placed the agricultural art on the same level as the military. Hence he was zealous in the improvement of agriculture. He was determined that his Prussian kingdom should be self-sufficing, and he did his best to force his people to produce for themselves all the necessities of life ; from his point of view they had no use for its amenities ; and he did his best to keep foreign goods out of the country. No man could have been more zealous than he for the good of his subjects as he understood it, appallingly narrow and rigid though his outlook was.

But happily perhaps for the world, he was conscious, at least in one direction, of his own intellectual limitations, and was mortally afraid of taking a hand in international politics lest he should find himself being made the dupe or tool of persons who were cleverer or more unscrupulous than himself. He did not venture to apply his strength to the pursuit of ambitious projects, partly because he was not ambitious, but partly from the distrust of his own capacity, the fear of being outwitted. There was no craft in Frederick William's composition ; both morally and intellectually he was incapable of duplicity ; but he knew himself to be no

match for the duplicity which he suspected on every hand, and of which he was not infrequently a victim when he did find himself dragged into the vortex of European politics.

In the early years of his reign Frederick William was comparatively fortunate in his foreign relations. He was drawn reluctantly into alliances, and consequently into a war with Charles XII of Sweden by Powers which wanted his help and had no objection to compensating him at Sweden's expense; by which means he acquired Stettin on the Baltic. After this his troops fought only when he considered himself under an obligation to give military support to the Emperor Charles VI—who made use of his services, but evaded the promised payment; which should have been the succession to Jülich and Berg, on the failure of direct heirs to the Elector Palatine. The king in fact was grossly tricked by the Emperor, and he died a disgusted and disappointed man, in May, 1740. Some six months afterwards, Charles VI followed him to the grave, and Frederick William's son exacted prompt vengeance from Charles's daughter.

CHAPTER III

FREDERICK THE GREAT

§ 1. *The Silesian Wars*

THE youth of Frederick II had been a training in endurance. Frederick William ruled his dominions as an autocrat; but however harsh and uncompromising his methods were he was obviously actuated by the conviction that all he did was for the good of his people; and his people raised no strenuous objection to having their lives rigorously directed for them. They were not accustomed to having their own way. In his domestic relations the king was no less convinced that what he ordained was entirely for the good of his house-

hold ; but it was not so easy to convince its members of the merits of the royal system.

Frederick William intended Frederick to be a replica of himself, whereas the Crown Prince's nature differed from his about as widely as that of any son can differ from his father's. Art and literature, the things of the intellect, were extremely attractive to the Crown Prince, while in the eyes of the King they were contemptible frivolities. The boy was attracted to French culture, the father regarded everything French as an abomination. The boy hated routine, to the father the whole of life was routine. Frederick would have been drilled into an automaton had it been in the power of man to make him one. The King did at last bring the Crown Prince to submission ; but only after he had been with difficulty dissuaded from putting him to death as a deserter, and had actually carried out the sentence upon the prince's most intimate friend.

In actual fact a *modus vivendi* was arrived at. Frederick threw himself zealously into the military duties which were demanded of him, and was rewarded for his aptitude by the concession of comparative liberty. The old king before he died showed that he had changed his opinion of the young man, and had even permitted himself to become proud of him. But such an up-bringing had the inevitable effect. It hardened Frederick into a complete cynicism to which he owed no small part of his success as a politician. Yet it is possible to believe that a man of his genius would have left a still greater name to posterity if his nobler qualities had been allowed free play.

The year 1740 produced a highly critical situation for Europe. The reigning emperor, Charles VI, was without male offspring. The Empire itself was theoretically elective ; but since the days of the Emperor Ferdinand I, the whole of his possessions whether inherited or acquired had passed down in the male line, and the successor to the Habsburg inheritance had invariably succeeded also to the Imperial crown. But now the male line terminated, and it was possible

for various persons with more or less plausibility to urge that their own claims to portions if not to the whole of the Habsburg inheritance were better than those of the emperor's daughter Maria Theresa. A break-up of the Austrian dominion was eminently desirable from the point of view both of France and of Spain ; Bavaria, Saxony and Sardinia all had claims of one kind or another. Other German princes might find it in their interest to demand terms for their support. The Emperor had been at great pains to secure from each of the important Powers a guarantee of the "Pragmatic Sanction," the decree by which he declared his daughter to be his heir. France had given the guarantee ; so had George II both as King of England and as Elector of Hanover. Frederick William of Prussia, conscientiously loyal to the Empire, had also given his guarantee. But whether any Power would hesitate to ignore its pledges on Charles VI's death was another question.

The event proved that no one except England and Hanover attached any importance to "scraps of paper." Charles VI died ; Maria Theresa claimed the entire Habsburg inheritance in accordance with the terms of the Pragmatic Sanction, and pressed the claim of her husband Francis of Lorraine—who had exchanged the duchy of Lorraine for that of Tuscany—to the Imperial succession. Charles Albert, Elector of Bavaria, asserted his counter-claim to both successions. The young king of Prussia saw his opportunity. He believed that he had the best, though not the largest, fighting machine in Europe ready to his hand. Before anyone else suspected his intentions, he marched his army into Silesia and informed Maria Theresa that if she would cede him that province of her dominions, he would maintain her claim to the Habsburg inheritance and give his vote for the election of her husband as Emperor. If she would not accede to his terms, he would take care of his own interests.

It is hardly an exaggeration to describe Frederick's occupation of Silesia as a piece of bare-faced robbery.

He scarcely made a pretence that his claims had any better justification than the difficulties of Maria Theresa's position. In plain terms he reckoned that if he occupied Silesia he could make sure of retaining it. As to the question whether he had any right to be in Silesia, there was the old claim to Jägerndorf and Liegnitz which was worth exactly as much as it had been worth before the Great Elector agreed to resign it in exchange for Schwiebus, twenty-five years before. The title was an exceedingly flimsy one at the best and had never been acknowledged by Austria as valid. Still, there it was, if a formal excuse was necessary. As for the guarantees of the Pragmatic Sanction which his father had given, its repudiation was a fair return for Austria's dishonesty in her treatment of the last Frederick over Schwiebus, and of Frederick William I over Berg.

Frederick, in fact, acted quite openly upon the theory that the game of international politics is habitually dishonestly played, and that there is no obligation to deal honestly at least with those players who themselves play dishonestly. Frederick had warrant enough for his doctrine in the conduct of the other Powers. France tore up the Pragmatic Sanction; Spain put forward claims to Habsburg possessions in Italy which were certainly no better than Frederick's claims to Silesia; Austria had beyond all question behaved with flagrant dishonesty to all three of Frederick's immediate predecessors, and the somewhat blind loyalty of Frederick's father had been extremely ill-rewarded. England, too, was besmirched by the shamelessness of her action over the treaty of Utrecht, negotiated when Frederick was in his cradle. It was not easy for any Power to throw stones at Frederick on the score of treachery; none of them could altogether plead not guilty to the charge of broken pledges at one time or another during the first forty years of the eighteenth century.

There has perhaps been no war in regard to which it is quite so difficult to discover tolerable excuses for most of the combatants as this War of the Austrian Succession. Great Britain and Spain were, before it broke

out, engaged on a quarrel of their own easy enough to understand, but not easy to excuse. Maria Theresa was fighting to retain the Austrian dominion intact. The Elector of Bavaria was fighting because he had some colour of a claim to a portion of the Habsburg possessions. Everyone who fought on the side of Maria Theresa was actually under a treaty obligation to do so ; but France, Spain, and Prussia, entered upon the war in complete defiance of treaty obligations, each one to get for herself whatever might be snatched from Austria ; Austrian Netherlands, Italian duchies, or Silesian territories.

The one direct change in Europe produced by the war was the transfer of Silesia from Austria to Prussia. In all other respects the peace of Aix la Chapelle in 1748 was practically a return to the *status quo ante bellum*. But if Frederick had not acquired Silesia, there would have been no Seven Years' War to follow. There must indeed have been a fight between France and Great Britain, because neither in America nor in India was there room for both of them. But the Prussian annexation of Silesia had two effects ; one, that it substantially increased the power and wealth of Prussia ; the other, that Maria Theresa's whole soul was set upon the recovery of the lost province. After 1748, therefore, it was quite certain that Frederick would have to fight sooner or later to retain what he had won. And there was not much doubt that somehow or other those two quarrels, the Franco-British and the Austro-Prussian, would get tangled together and would involve other European Powers. And this was directly due to Frederick's unprovoked act of aggression, his seizure of Silesia in the winter of 1740-41.

Frederick's stroke met with the success which morally it was very far from deserving. It would not appear that the people of Silesia cared greatly whether they were attached to the Austrian or to the Prussian crown ; on the whole they probably preferred the Prussian. But no one ever thought of consulting their views. They did not, however, offer any material resistance to

Frederick ; only fortresses garrisoned by Austrian troops stood out against the invasion. Active campaigning did not begin until the spring of 1741 was almost at an end. The first pitched battle, Mollwitz, redounded to the credit of the Prussian infantry, but not much to Frederick's own. The cavalry, his weakest arm, was defeated, and he himself left the field under the impression that all was lost ; but the Prussian infantry, commanded by Schwerin, turned defeat into victory ; it was the Austrians who were beaten, and Frederick was practically master of the greater part of Silesia.

Frederick was the only enemy who had hitherto taken the field against Maria Theresa. His own hope was that she would see the situation in the same light as he did himself, and would concede his demands in order to secure his support. Had she done so it is possible that the coalition which had been formed for the partition of Austria would have broken up. But the queen was of far too high a spirit to purchase Frederick's support at Frederick's price, in spite of pressure from Great Britain, where there was no inclination to quarrel with Prussia—Frederick's mother, it may be noted, was sister of George II of England. France was engineering the coalition with Spain, Sardinia, Bavaria, and Saxony ; each of those states was to have its share of the spoils. Frederick, when his terms were refused by the queen after Mollwitz, decided to join the allies, with whom he entered upon a treaty ; hitherto he had acted independently.

By a curious fiction France entered the war as the auxiliary of Bavaria while Great Britain and Hanover entered it as auxiliaries of Austria ; theoretically, France and Great Britain were not at war with each other. The anti-Pragmatic allies marched towards Vienna. Maria Theresa, whose position was extremely critical, appealed to her Hungarian subjects whose loyalty had been in doubt ; they answered the appeal with enthusiasm. Disagreement among the Allies delayed their movement upon Vienna ; yet the fall of her capital seemed so imminent that Maria Theresa

reluctantly yielded to the pressure of her advisers and reopened negotiations with Frederick ; with the result, largely the work of the English diplomatists, that the secret treaty of Klein-Schnellendorf, a verbal agreement, was adopted ; under which Lower Silesia was to be ceded after an interval, and in the meantime was to be evacuated by the Austrians after a brief resistance.

Frederick had no qualms at all about deserting the allies whom he had so recently joined ; but he had at least the excuse of knowing that any or all of them would desert the coalition without the smallest compunction, in the pursuit of their own interests. At the same time he made a condition which practically assured him of an opportunity of breaking the new convention if it suited him to do so ; he made it clear that he would no longer hold himself bound if the existence of the compact should be divulged, though he was well aware that it could not be kept secret. For the time being, however, both parties kept to their agreement. The Austrians surrendered Neisse after a stage siege, and evacuated Lower Silesia ; while Frederick withdrew his army from active operations. Frederick's supposed allies found themselves unexpectedly faced by the Austrian troops which they had imagined to be absorbed in the defence of Silesia.

The secret treaty was made on October 9th. In the course of the following weeks the allies, who, owing to divided counsels, had not marched upon Vienna, did succeed in capturing Prague, somewhat to their own surprise. Frederick was disappointed ; apparently Maria Theresa would after all not be able to hold her own. On that hypothesis, it would be more to his advantage to desert to the old alliance. There was no difficulty in repudiating the Klein-Schellendorf treaty on the ground that the secret had not been kept as promised. Before the end of the year Frederick, once more as a member of the coalition, was invading Moravia.

Out of this he got no more good than he deserved. The Moravians, unlike the Silesians, were emphatically

hostile. The Austrians took the offensive in Bavaria ; the tide was not flowing as Frederick wished, and he drew back from Moravia, having accomplished nothing. His allies were obviously concerned only with their own interest and gave him no assistance. Through British mediation, negotiations were reopened between Frederick and Maria Theresa ; but even Frederick could not swallow her demand that he should take active part against his nominal allies—in return for which aid the queen offered him a part of Upper as well as Lower Silesia. So Austrian armies again advanced against Frederick, but were soundly beaten by him at the battle of Chotusitz. This time, Frederick owed his victory to his own skill. The effect was convincing, and negotiations were again opened. Austrian successes against the French had their influence on Frederick ; and in June the treaty of Breslau was signed. Frederick was to hold all Lower and most of Upper Silesia in perpetual sovereignty, and was to withdraw entirely from the war.

For a couple of years the war went on, Frederick taking no part in it. In the course of it fresh alliances were formed, from which Frederick, rightly or wrongly, drew the conclusion that Austria was preparing to repudiate the treaty of Breslau and to threaten the possession of Silesia. He provided himself with an excuse for again taking up arms, in the misfortunes of the Emperor Charles VII, the Bavarian Elector (who had defeated Francis of Lorraine at the Imperial election, but had been ejected from Bavaria by the Austrians). Frederick professed that he was actuated merely by loyalty to the Emperor and the principles of the Empire. He had been preparing for the possibility of a renewal of the war, reorganising his finances, recuperating and strengthening his army.

In August 1744 Frederick's troops were in Bohemia. He captured Prague, but the campaign was not otherwise successful ; he was in effect outgeneralled by the Austrian Traun. There was now no longer any question that Austria would do its best to recover Silesia ;

Frederick's attack made that absolutely justifiable. In the next year, 1745, the Austrians invaded Silesia ; but this time they were not under Traun's command, and met with a smashing defeat from Frederick at Hohenfriedberg. The death of Charles VII and the election of Francis of Lorraine as Emperor removed the particular pretext upon which Frederick had re-entered the war ; but the question now was whether he would be able to retain Silesia. Maria Theresa was determined that he should not. In spite of the defeat at Hohenfriedberg, Austria renewed the attack. Again Frederick won a brilliant victory at Sohr against greatly superior forces in the early autumn. Still Maria Theresa would not surrender her hopes ; being now in alliance with Saxony, which was intensely jealous of Prussia, she renewed the campaign. The Prussians defeated both the Austrians and the Saxons, and before the end of the year Frederick entered Dresden. Maria Theresa was at last convinced ; and on Christmas Day, the treaty of peace was signed which confirmed Frederick in the possession of Silesia.

The nett result of the two Silesian wars, the Prussian phase of the War of the Austrian Succession, was the acquisition of Silesia by Prussia, the demonstration that she was a first-class military power, and her virtual release from the suzerainty of the Emperor. These results had been achieved by one flagrant act of aggression for which practically the only real excuse was that the Habsburgs had brought it on themselves by their unscrupulous treatment of Prussia in the past. After the first act of aggression, Frederick had shown himself entirely unscrupulous both in the making and in the breaking the treaty of Klein-Schnellendorf ; yet for the making of it he had the excuse that he could not count on the good faith of his previous allies, while for the breaking of it he had taken care beforehand to make sure that a technical justification would be forthcoming. His renewal of the war in 1744 does not appear to have been aggressive in its intention ; he suspected, if he could not prove, that the security of

Silesia was at stake ; and although during that war he was uniformly successful after the first campaign, he neither obtained nor claimed more than the confirmation of his sovereignty in Silesia. But he was threatened with the penalty attending all forcible annexations which have no basis in the claims of justice. The Power from which Silesia had been torn by force was determined to recover it by force if the opportunity should arise ; and not only to recover it, but to annihilate the robber.

§ 2. *The Seven Years' War*

Before eleven years were out the struggle was renewed. Frederick never had a doubt that it would be renewed. The ten years which followed the Treaty of Dresden were devoted to recuperation, preparation, which should enable the country to face the coming storm. We need not here go into the details of the diplomatic revolution which completely changed the combinations of the Powers. France and Great Britain, as we have already remarked, were quite certain sooner or later to fight out their own duel for supremacy in America and in India. Austria, no longer threatened with partition, had one overmastering desire, the destruction of Frederick. In this she knew she could have no help from Great Britain ; the triumph of her diplomacy lay in the success with which she converted France into an ally instead of an enemy. Frederick on the other hand brought Russia into the circle of his own enemies by indulging his wit at the expense of the Tsarina Elizabeth. The practical outcome was that at the beginning of the year 1756, Austria was elaborating a coalition comprising France, Russia and Saxony, for the annihilation of Frederick, while Great Britain and Hanover had drifted into an alliance with Frederick. The British Government was at the time without a directing head, though nominally led by the Duke of Newcastle. In both groups of alliances, the Anglo-French quarrel was outside the contract ; and when in the summer France

kindled the conflagration by attacking and capturing Minorca from the British, there was no obligation upon any of the other Powers to take part in the conflict.

Frederick, however, was by this time thoroughly satisfied, having secret information that Austria was only waiting till her preparations were complete to launch the whole forces of the coalition against him. His one chance was to strike first, to put one of his expected enemies out of action, and to deal Austria a blow which should at any rate cripple her offensive. If he sat still till he was attacked he would be overwhelmed, for he was encircled by Russia on the east, Austria and Saxony on the south. On the west, Hanover afforded no very strong protection, and presently the army of France would be moving against him.

Let it here be observed that Germany in 1914 pretended that she had practically the same justification for her action as Frederick in 1756 ; that she was faced by a coalition of Russia, France, England, and Belgium, which was only awaiting a favourable opportunity to strike at and annihilate her. The fundamental difference lies in the fact that the plea was true in 1756 and was proved to be true by documents which fell into Frederick's hands ; whereas in 1914 the plea was palpably untrue, the powers of the Entente had no intention whatever of attacking Germany, and there was no shadow of evidence to justify even the suspicion. Had the plea been true in 1914 even the violation of Belgian neutrality would have been warranted, as Frederick's action was actually warranted in 1756. Self-preservation would have compelled Germany to strike her hardest regardless of obligations which her enemies were intending to treat as "scraps of paper." As matters actually stood, Frederick's conduct cannot be pleaded as a precedent.

In the late summer, then, of 1756 Frederick had made up his mind. Roughly speaking the military situation was this. Brandenburg forms the northern half of a rough quadrilateral of which Saxony and

Silesia are the two southern quarters. On the south of this are the Austrian provinces of Bohemia and Moravia; east of it Poland, which would give passage to Russia. West of Brandenburg were Hanover and Brunswick, supporters of Prussia; west of Saxony and Hanover, German principalities which at any rate would not resist the advance of French troops. In dealing with the circle of enemies, Frederick possessed the one important advantage of holding the inner lines; he was at the centre of the semi-circle, and could mass troops on any point of the circumference with comparative rapidity, striking in detail at the converging forces of his enemies.

There had been nothing like a declaration of war either by or against Frederick. It was quite obvious, however, that Austria was preparing to attack him, and he knew that Saxony was, or would soon be, in the league. His plan therefore, was, to paralyse the hostility of Saxony, fling his troops through Saxony into Bohemia, and so carry the war into the enemy's country before that enemy could enter Silesia. At the end of August he suddenly marched his army upon Dresden, with the professed object of procuring the publication of secret documents in the Dresden archives, and the neutrality or alliance of Saxony.

In this story, Saxony stands for Belgium in the modern version. She was not, in fact, committed to hostilities against Prussia, though Frederick had adequate grounds for the conviction that she would join his enemies. Hence it is not easy to be convinced that the attack upon Saxony was justified; although there was no breach of faith involved as in the case of the violation of a neutrality guaranteed by the violator himself. Saxony, like Belgium, resented the violation, refused the terms proffered by Frederick, and offered the stoutest resistance possible for her much smaller forces. The result, as in 1914, was that the Prussian plan of operations was spoilt. Instead of dashing through Saxony upon Bohemia and carrying everything before him, while Austrian preparations were hopelessly behind-hand, he was held up in Saxony until it was

too late to carry out the original scheme. Saxony was indeed placed *hors de combat*, but not so completely as to prevent Saxon troops from taking effective part against Frederick in later battles. It is possible that Frederick would have served his own ends better by foregoing the military advantage of carrying his troops through Saxony. Still, in Frederick's case, there was a double consideration which had to be taken into account. The presumption, at least, was strong that Saxony would not remain neutral but would join the coalition, and Frederick could not afford the risk of having Saxony armed and hostile on his flank.

Austria was not ready to save Saxony ; in the course of time the Saxon army was compelled to capitulate at Pirna. Moreover, Frederick was able to publish the documents found in Dresden which proved the existence of the concerted plan for the partition of Prussia, a conclusive justification of his action as directed against Austria. In spite of the time gained by the Saxon resistance, Austria was still not ready when Frederick broke across the Bohemian frontier from Saxony in May, shattered her advance army by a brilliantly won victory, and drove it into Prague, from which city the battle takes its name. But by this time the bargaining between the members of the coalition was settled, their conclusive treaty had been signed, all their armies were in motion or on the verge of moving, and Sweden had been added to their number. In June, a fresh Austrian army advanced to relieve Prague. Frederick's recent success led him to underrate his enemies. He attacked them with greatly inferior numbers at Kolin ; orders were misapprehended, and a subordinate blundered ; a body of Saxons who had escaped the Pirna capitulation and were serving with the Austrians fought with an irresistible fury ; and Frederick's army was driven in rout over the Bohemian border.

From this time to the end of the Seven Years' War, Frederick was fighting for bare life against overwhelming odds. Obviously he had brought this fate upon him-



self by the initial act of robbery in 1740 ; but his enemies had no intention of stopping short when they should have deprived him again of the purloined province. They meant to grind him to powder, and he fought them with an indomitable courage, skill, and resource which command the highest admiration and fully deserved their ultimate success.

In the year 1757, Frederick's salvation lay in the swiftness of his own movements and the slowness of his adversaries. As yet there was practically no help forthcoming from his British ally ; for the ministerial coalition in England which made William Pitt virtual dictator was not effected till the last days of June. Luckily for Frederick the Austrians made little use of their victory and allowed him to recover from the first shock which had almost reduced him to despair, and to reorganise his army. On the other hand, the French army from the lower Rhine pushed back the Hanoverian forces under the command of the Duke of Cumberland and compelled him to a capitulation at Klosterseven in September. Another French army under Soubise was moving from the Upper Rhine upon Saxony. The Austrians were threatening Silesia, and the Russians East Prussia. Suddenly there came a transformation scene.

Frederick's sole chance was to force an engagement with Soubise, win a decisive victory in the west, and then repeat the process in Silesia. This was precisely what he did. At Rossbach, Soubise, who had hitherto avoided a pitched battle, was given an apparent opportunity of enveloping Frederick's much smaller force. He yielded to temptation, exposed his flank in the course of his movement, and suffered an overwhelming defeat on November 5th. The southern French army was totally disabled. Frederick with his victorious troops sped to the east to check the progress of the Austrians from Silesia, and routed them precisely a month after Rossbach in the still more brilliant victory of Leuthen. In the north-east the Russian army fell back for political reasons, and the Swedes who had

attacked Pomerania were driven back into Stralsund. Meanwhile the British Government repudiated Cumberland's convention of Klosterseven, upon which the French had acted prematurely. The army in Hanover was reorganised and placed under the command of Ferdinand of Brunswick ; also it was presently for the first time reinforced by a substantial British contingent, and during the rest of the war proved always a more than efficient barrier against the French attack.

Brilliant as were the victories of Rossbach and Leuthen, both of them won against armies of more than double Frederick's strength, with enormous loss to the enemy and comparatively small loss to the Prussians, they were in no way decisive. France, Russia, and Austria, were each of them able to place in the field very much larger forces than the whole of those which were at Frederick's disposal. The British alliance was of the utmost value to Frederick, because Great Britain poured money into his treasury and crippled the French attack by sweeping the French fleet off the seas and by perpetually threatening descents upon the French coast. Also the British contingent with the army of Ferdinand of Brunswick very materially added to its strength. But in effect France was the only member of the anti-Prussian coalition against whom Great Britain made war directly ; nor did she take France off Frederick's hands completely, since her troops formed only a small though a valuable part of Ferdinand's army. Frederick, in fact, was fighting singlehanded against Russia, Austria, and Austria's German allies, while a substantial part of his forces was always detained with the army in North Germany. He was never able to act simply on the defensive, because it was always imperative to prevent Russians and Austrians from uniting in overwhelming force. He could never strike at either with much less than his whole strength ; the necessary concentration against one always gave the other the opportunity of resuming the aggressive ; so that if a victory was gained at one point the king straightway found himself obliged to hurry off to another scene of



the war, leaving the defeated adversary to recover from the blow and collect fresh forces. Frederick was never able to bide his time ; he had to force the adversary to fight without waiting ; he could shatter, but he could not annihilate. And every engagement meant losses which even if small as compared with the enemy's losses were a more serious strain upon the comparatively limited supply of men on whom he had to draw. Never after the defeat at Kolin could Frederick hope to do more than hold his own in the long run ; and to hold his own required a supreme combination of skill, of audacity verging upon recklessness, and of indomitable resolution.

At the end of 1757 the Austrians were beaten out of Silesia. In the next year he resumed the offensive and attacked Moravia, but his operations here were ineffective, and in the summer a Russian army was pushing into Brandenburg. Frederick had to give up his Moravian campaign, hurry to the north, and fight the sanguinary battle of Zorndorf. Although his victory compelled the Russians to retire, the Austrians in the meantime were invading Saxony. Frederick dashed back, but overrated the immobility of the Austrian commander Daun, with the result that he was seriously defeated at Hochkirch and was obliged to retreat ; though happily for him Daun was contented with his victory and made no further movement.

The year 1759, though rich in British triumphs, was disastrous for Frederick. The one success on the Continent was Ferdinand of Brunswick's brilliant victory over the French army of the Rhine at Minden. But for English subsidies, the Prussian treasury would have been entirely depleted ; only a remnant of the troops which had won Rossbach and Leuthen survived. The Austrian armies were improving, both in material and in leadership. In the summer the Russians were again invading Brandenburg. Frederick had not ventured to resume the offensive ; now he had to fight the Russians, and was ruinously defeated at Kùnersdorf, in attempting, with exhausted troops, to transform a

partial victory into a decisive triumph. If, the Russians had advanced after Künersdorf, Frederick's fate would have been sealed. In fact, he did for a time give way to complete despair. But the Russians sat still. So also, happily, did the Austrians, and Frederick was allowed to collect his scattered army together, and to shake off the despairing fit.

Frederick, in fact, was saved by the supineness both of Daun and of the Russian commander, if not by actual treachery on the part of the latter. Yet, before the end of the year he was in still worse plight. An Austrian force captured Dresden immediately after Künersdorf, and dominated Saxony; and in the winter a Prussian army of 12,000 men allowed itself to be completely entrapped at Maxen, and was forced to surrender, since its general had not dared to depart from the letter of Frederick's instructions.

We need not follow the rest of the struggle in detail. In spite of further misfortunes during the first half of 1760, Frederick in August recovered some ground in Silesia by a victory over one of the Austrian armies at Liegnitz, tricked the advancing Russians into withdrawal by deliberately allowing a misleading despatch to fall into their hands, and inflicted a heavy defeat upon Daun at Torgau. Exhaustion was telling upon the Austrians as well as upon the Prussians. Political intrigues, and a general uncertainty as to what particular faction was about to become predominant in Russia, kept the Russian armies from effective action; and during 1761, there were no pitched battles. At the end of the year the enemy were in occupation of great parts of Silesia and of Pomerania. Moreover, just at this time William Pitt, in England, the staunchest of allies, was obliged to resign owing to the ascendancy of Lord Bute over George III, who had succeeded his father towards the end of 1760. Bute quite obviously intended to make peace and leave Frederick in the lurch. But Prussia was rescued by a happy accident. The death of the Tsarina Elizabeth raised Peter III, an enthusiastic admirer

of Frederick, to the Russian throne. Russia immediately withdrew its support from Austria. The death of Peter and the accession of Catherine II, his wife, made no material change in the situation ; while against the Austrians alone Frederick succeeded, though with difficulty, in holding his own, and even recovered the lost ground in Silesia.

In fact, by this time all the combatants except Great Britain and Russia were completely spent. Russia had no further interest in a war for taking part in which originally the principal motive had been the personal spite of the Tsarina Elizabeth against Frederick. The king and the dominant ministers in England, for reasons unintelligible to the nation at large, wanted peace at any price, even that of deserting an ally. So the Seven Years' War was brought to an end by the peace of Paris ; and Austria, faced by the possibility that Russia might give active support to Prussia, made terms with Frederick at the peace of Hubertsburg which left the Prussian territories as they were when the war began.

§ 3. *After the War*

Frederick had had enough of war. Half the years of his reign so far had been occupied with fighting. He had added to Prussia a province which greatly increased her wealth and her military security. He had taught the Prussians themselves, and the nations of Europe also, to believe in the invincibility of the Prussian army under his leadership. Any Power, any combination of Powers, would certainly think twice before attacking him. He was not satisfied with what he had got ; he still wanted West Prussia, that portion of the Polish kingdom which intervened between Brandenburg and East Prussia ; but he was content to wait for this—and got it within ten years, without a shot fired.

The partition of Poland was perhaps the most shameless example of successful political brigandage on record. Poland was cursed with a constitution which practically deprived her of all power of organisation.

An elective monarchy made her crown an explosive toy for the European Powers to play with. Tsarina Catherine of Russia procured the election of a puppet of her own, and Poland was very nearly converted into a province of Russia. Then Polish patriots revolted. Turkey, hoping to strike a blow at Russia, supported the revolt ; Russia invaded Turkey's Trans-Danube provinces. Austria threatened intervention. Frederick, deserted by Great Britain at the end of the Seven Years' War, had resolved never again to trust that Power. Pitt he trusted absolutely, but experience had taught him that continuity of British policy under the existing British system was not to be looked for, and he successfully courted Russian instead of British friendship. Having entered in close alliance with the Tsarina, he did not now wish to find himself involved in a war with Austria on her behalf. He evaded it by suggesting a division of other people's property, which would make fighting superfluous ; to be effected by agreement between Austria, Russia, and Prussia.

Poland was to be the victim. She was not indeed to disappear ; there was still to be a Poland on the map of Europe, even a substantial Poland. But each of the three Powers was to have a province, on its own borders ; and the Prussian province was to include very nearly all that lay between East Prussia and Brandenburg, though the port of Danzig was excluded, and Thorn on the Vistula was still outside the new Prussian boundary. The triangle between West Prussia, the newly acquired district, and Silesia, was left for the covetousness of Frederick's successor. West Prussia and Silesia were the territorial additions made by Frederick the Great to his kingdom. Both were the spoils of pure brigandage. But Frederick had at least the excuse that one was required to give his possessions territorial continuity, while the other was necessary to Prussia if she was ever to be more than a third-class Power.

As for international ethics, it must be frankly recognised that in the eighteenth century no Power

permitted conscientious scruples to interfere with such projects. France under Louis XIV tore up treaties and sought to extend her frontiers without the smallest compunction. Russia and Austria went shares with Prussia in the partition of Poland. The notable fact about Frederick is not that he professed openly the principle upon which his neighbours were quite ready to act, that he had no hesitation in betraying an ally whose good faith he distrusted, or that he invaded his neighbours' territories first and declared war afterwards ; but that his conduct in so doing should be regarded by a later generation as admirable, laudable, and as presenting an example of the most consummate statesmanship. He adopted the common but not the highest standards of his time with a cynical frankness, and with remarkable success ; unscrupulous as Frederick was he did not betray those who were not ready to betray him. But the greatest triumphs of all those of which he was an eye-witness were achieved by men who never betrayed anyone, William Pitt and George Washington.

For Frederick the Great, Austria was always the enemy or rival, potential or actual ; after the Seven Years' War, he looked upon alliance with Russia, Austria's rival in the east, as the primary need of Prussian foreign policy ; since the conduct of the British Government after the fall of Pitt had inspired him not only with distrust but with positive animosity towards the English. Within Germany his actions were guided by the same desire to counteract and weaken the power and influence of Austria. He was determined to prevent the Emperor Joseph's scheme of exchanging the Austrian Netherlands for Bavaria ; the Netherlands were remote from Austria, difficult to govern and a constant source of trouble to her, whereas the territory of Bavaria was continuous with her own. It was this antagonism to Austria which caused Frederick in his latter years to form the *Fürstenbund* or League of Princes, nominally for the maintenance of the Imperial constitution, actually to prevent the Emperor from acquiring increased power.

§ 4. Appreciation

There is no sign in Frederick of German nationalism, the conception of German unity and common German interests over-riding the interests of particular German states. His passion for the particular interests of Prussia, his Prussian patriotism, was whole-hearted and exclusive. It is not unedifying to note the conclusions of a modern German professor regarding him: "Frederick, King of Prussia, has become a German national hero, however little he may have desired that honour. He did not appreciate the future open to the nation which admired him, and whose poets sang his praises; but he made his will to be law from the Baltic to the Alps. The destiny of the Hohenzollerns was not yet accomplished. A century was to pass by before the will of the [German] nation made them the guardians of its honour and power, and bound up its fortunes indissolubly with theirs. The road travelled to that goal was the road marked out by the Great Elector and the Great Frederick, the road of force and ruthlessness, by which most modern states have travelled."

Frederick, building upon the foundations, and employing the materials for which he was indebted to his own father and to the Great Elector, made Prussia a first-class Power, although both her population and her resources were very much smaller than those of any other Power of the front rank. He succeeded in doing so because he found ready to his hand a consummate military machine which he perfected and enlarged; because his men would go anywhere and do anything at his command; and because he was personally the most brilliant general of his time. When the fighting was done, he made it his business to develop the resources of Prussia, to foster her industries, to educate her people, to administer the law with even-handed rigour. He ruled Prussia as a despot, but with a single eye to the benefit of his people as he conceived it. There was no such thing as government by the people;

the despot knew what was good for the people and gave it to them ; it was of no consequence whether they thought it was good for them (which, as a matter of fact, they generally did). But the whole value of the system depended entirely on the qualifications of the despot, his insight, his efficiency, his concentration on a single aim—the welfare of his subjects. After Frederick's death, when the master spirit and the master hand were removed, the Prussian monarchy failed ignominiously ; and Prussia played a contemptible part in Europe until a new spirit awoke in the nation itself, and its Hohenzollern ruler was swept along upon a tide which he did not himself control.

German unity was created in the third quarter of the nineteenth century by Bismarck as the minister of a Hohenzollern monarch. For Bismarck, German unity meant in fact, although not in technical form, the annexation of the rest of Germany by Prussia on the pretext of German nationalism. Hence the development of the myth that the great Hohenzollern of the eighteenth century was a champion of German nationalism. As a matter of fact he, like Bismarck, was the champion of Prussian ascendancy at all costs. He assumed the rôle of champion of State rights as against Imperial aggression because Imperial aggression was a danger to Prussian ascendancy, even to Prussian security ; but in the eighteenth century the conception of German unity had no more real existence in political circles than the conception of the "rights of man," or than that of Italian unity in Italy. Frederick's service was given not to Germany but to Prussia. The myth in question was a later creation.

There was another myth attaching to him in his own day which, if ever he was quite alive to it, must have caused him a vast amount of cynical entertainment. To his English allies he was the Protestant hero, the champion of the reformed religion. There were, in fact, certain excuses for this imagination. The crushing of Prussia would have meant the complete ascendancy in Germany of Austria and the Catholic States, and

might have been followed by the revival of an intolerant Catholic régime. There is no doubt that Louis XV was induced to join the Austrian alliance by the idea that in uniting himself with orthodox against heretical Powers he would square accounts with Heaven for his private immoralities. The idea that Frederick himself was actuated by religious motives was peculiar to the English people. In this as in most other matters, Frederick was very far indeed from being a typical Hohenzollern. From the Great Elector downwards, nearly all the reigning princes of that House have been distinguished by a species of piety. The Great Elector was prevented by the sincerity of his Protestantism from accepting the Polish crown. The later Hohenzollerns have adopted that peculiar form of piety which extends its imperial patronage to the Almighty *quamdiu se bene gesserit*. But Frederick the Great was a sceptic to whom as to Voltaire religious beliefs were necessary for the masses but foolishness to the intelligent. The invention of the Prussian tribal god belonged to a later generation.

CHAPTER IV

FREDERICK'S SUCCESSORS

§ 1. *Frederick William II*

THE immediate successors of Frederick II did not add to the lustre of the family name. He was not the ancestor of the present Kaiser; the kings who came after him were not his descendants; his heir was not his son but his nephew. Frederick William II was entirely devoid of great qualities. He was personally brave, he was good-natured, and otherwise his virtues were entirely negative. He was a voluptuary, and he was what is miscalled, a mystic; that is to say, he dabbled in occultism, and belonged to the Rosicrucians; which merely meant that he was the prey of charlatans. It is obvious that the old king regarded him with contempt.

He came to the Prussian throne just as a critical chapter in the world's history was about to open. It was the year 1786. Despotism, more or less benevolent, completely dominated Europe. The Emperor Joseph II, a curious mixture of enlightenment and short-sightedness, was endeavouring to bestow upon his subjects benefits which they did not generally appreciate, and to strengthen his own power by methods which neither his own subjects nor foreign Powers approved. Louis XVI was doing his best to reign amiably in France where successive ministers were making futile efforts to release the country from financial chaos, unconscious of the terrific upheaval that was so near at hand. In the East, Catherine of Russia was paying strict attention to her own interests. In England the younger Pitt had just been established in power. In Holland the Prussian king's brother-in-law, the Stadtholder William of Orange, was engaged in the time honoured struggle of his house for supremacy in the Republic against the Republican party which, in accordance with its tradition, looked upon France as its friend.

The world was not anticipating any volcanic eruptions. Old Frederick went to his grave unperturbed by any such forebodings. He left the kingdom in excellent order for his successor; but, as often happens, when a masterful man has gathered all the strings of government into his own hands, he left no one behind him competent to assume control. When Frederick William was not being managed by his Rosicrucian friends he was generally guided, at least as concerned foreign affairs, by Hertzberg, a minister of Frederick's, competent as a servant but not as a counsellor. There was not much prospect in these circumstances that the Prussian Government would take large views or display high statesmanship if critical times should arise.

The death of Frederick, however, had removed a serious obstacle to the establishment of decently friendly relations with England. In fact, very shortly after his accession Frederick William found himself coming into alliance with Great Britain. British

statesmen, then as now, regarded it as a primary point of British policy that neither Holland nor the Austrian Netherlands—in effect the modern Belgium—should be controlled by a state which might threaten the British maritime power. The Netherlands in Austrian hands were not dangerous. Owned or managed by France either Holland or the Netherlands would be very dangerous indeed. Frederick William, conveniently for England, felt called upon to intervene in arms on behalf of his sister and brother-in-law against the Francophil Dutch Republicans; receiving moral support from the British in his intervention. The result was that Frederick William acquired a misplaced confidence in the perfection of his own army; while, to the profit of Great Britain, he restored the domination of the Stadholder's party in Holland; and the three Powers of Prussia, Holland, and Great Britain entered upon a Triple Alliance.

Prussian interests, however, were in Frederick William's eyes more concerned with eastern than with western Europe. The Tsarina Catherine was playing her own complicated game for Turkish and Polish additions to her own territories; in the course of which she succeeded in involving the Emperor Joseph in a war with Turkey, while he was also being inconveniently hampered by the hostility of his subjects in the Netherlands. Frederick William, however, could not excite Pitt into hostility towards either Joseph or his brother Leopold II, who succeeded him in 1790. With regard to Catherine of Russia he was more successful, since Pitt, departing from his father's views, regarded the progress of Russia with alarm. But Pitt could not carry the nation with him; and the Prussian king, on discovering that so far as the East was concerned Great Britain was a broken reed, found himself reduced to diplomatic barginings with the Emperor and the Tsarina—a game which those two astute monarchs both understood much better than he did.

Meanwhile, however, affairs in France were marching. The States General, summoned at the beginning of 1789,

turned themselves into a National Assembly. In the summer the Bastille was destroyed, while the world, a good deal puzzled as to what was really going on, applauded or denounced French irregularities. The National Assembly developed into the Constituent Assembly for the creation of a new constitution, and dealt drastically with the privileges of the noblesse and the clergy. The aristocrats sought safer quarters outside of France and began to clamour for foreign intervention, while the King was virtually a prisoner at the Tuilleries. The last chance of efficient leadership and something like a popular monarchy vanished with the death of Mirabeau, in March 1791; and in June of that year the flight to Varennes and the return to Paris virtually sealed the fate of the monarchy, since nearly all France believed that Louis had fled in the hope of procuring his own restoration by the aid of foreign armies.

This disastrous event occurred just when the Tsarina had been relieved of the fear that Great Britain as a member of the Triple Alliance would offer armed support to Prussia in the East. Before this Leopold felt himself necessary to Catherine; now he did so no longer, and was consequently disposed to seek closer relations with Prussia. The Varennes affair, too, might make it necessary for him to intervene on behalf of his sister, the French queen, Marie Antoinette; and Frederick William, influenced perhaps indirectly by the *émigrés*, was leaning towards intervention. Leopold did not mean to intervene if he could help it; he hoped that there might still be a monarchical restoration which would not restore to power in France the *émigrés*, whom he detested both politically and personally. Carrying Frederick William along with him, he issued the Declaration of Pilnitz, an empty threat which pledged the Powers to nothing; and was shortly afterwards able to announce that intervention had become superfluous since the King of France had accepted the new constitution. But in France the mischief was done. The French nation would not tolerate foreign dictation. It made up its mind that the insolent

monarchs of Europe were venturing to dictate to it, coupling Prussia and Austria together; and early in 1792 France declared war upon Prussia and Austria, Leopold most inopportune dying and leaving the succession to his very inadequate son and heir, Francis II.

If Leopold had survived it is probable enough that he would have succeeded in establishing a controlling influence over Frederick William. As matters stood, neither at Berlin nor at Vienna was there a monarch or minister capable of handling the situation intelligently and effectively. Austrian and Prussian troops threatened the French frontier. The Prussians were placed under the command of the Duke of Brunswick, reckoned a capable general of the old school of Frederick the Great. Brunswick, in accordance with instructions, issued a proclamation which was intended to terrify Paris, and only had the effect of filling the souls of persons hitherto comparatively moderate with a patriotic rage. France rushed to arms; the invasion of French territory was followed by the September massacres in Paris, and the French army, somewhat to its own surprise, held its own against the Prussians in the engagement known as the Cannonade of Valmy. The battle in itself was by no means a remarkable one; its effects on the other hand were immense. Politically it destroyed the Monarchy and established the Republic in the hands of a fervent war party, aggressively resolved to compel Europe to embrace "Liberty." And in the military point of view the cannonade of Valmy enabled the French army to find itself. From that time forward it was fighting not to resist conquest but to conquer. In January the French Republic cut off the head of "Louis Capet," having first flung down a direct challenge to Great Britain, which had hitherto hoped to remain merely an interested spectator, by tearing up the "scrap of paper" in which both the Powers had guaranteed the exclusive navigation of the Scheldt to Holland. At the close of January 1793 Great Britain was added to the belligerent Powers at war with France.

The Coalition, which included Austria, Prussia, Great

Britain, Spain and Sardinia, lasted until 1795, after which Great Britain and Austria were left to maintain the struggle by themselves. These years did not redound to the credit of the allied arms. It was not long before British fleets dominated the seas ; but the performances on land were for the most part contemptible. Least creditable of all was the part played by Prussia.

The fact of the matter was that the attention of both Austria and Prussia was distracted between France and Poland. The two monarchs were, as monarchs, strongly interested in the restoration of monarchy in France ; Francis, in particular, because of his relationship to the French queen. But apart from this personal interest, Prussian statesmanship was not keenly alive to the importance of the French struggle. The West German states subject to the Prussian Crown were isolated from the rest of the kingdom, to which they were of little direct advantage. The progress of French arms did not at any time appear to be a very serious menace to Prussia herself. For Austria it was more serious because the Austrian Netherlands provided an objective for the French armies ; but Austria, too, was fully aware that Great Britain and Holland were even more interested than she was herself in preventing the Netherlands from falling under French dominion. And both Powers saw the Tsarina conducting her own operations in relation both to Turkey and to Poland, undistracted by the commotions in Western Europe. Hence, even before Britain and Holland entered the coalition, while the armies of the new-born Republic were turning the tables upon Austria and Prussia on the Rhine and in the Netherlands, Francis could only keep Frederick William in co-operation by leaving him practically free to make his own arrangements with Catherine. While the hapless Louis was undergoing his nominal trial in France, Frederick William and Catherine were settling the second partition of Poland which gave to Russia huge provinces on the east, and to Prussia the territory of Posen, lying between West Prussia and Silesia.

This, however, was by no means a final settlement

of the Polish question. Throughout the whole period of the first Coalition, from the beginning of 1793 to the summer of 1795, Prussian armies were only kept in the field because Britain paid for their maintenance. Moreover, although they were in the field, they were under orders to do nothing; since Prussia considered that the British subsidies did not deprive her of the right to direct the operation of her own troops exclusively in her own interests. Neither to Austria nor to Britain did the Prussian armies render any effective assistance. At length Pitt, in disgust, withdrew the Prussian subsidies; and in April 1795, Prussia retired from the Coalition, making the separate treaty of Basel with France. She had already at the beginning of the year made the third compact for the partition of Poland by which that unhappy country disappeared from the map of Europe as a separate entity. This time Austria, which had been left out at the second partition, got her share. Prussia rounded off her territories by the acquisition of that part of Poland which lay between her last acquisition and East Prussia. The lion's share went to Catherine. This final partition, however, did not actually take effect until the autumn.

For ten years from this time Prussia was in retirement. At the end of 1795 the youthful General Bonaparte was appointed to the command of the French armies in Italy, where his wonderful campaigns in the next year prepared the way for his great duel with Britain. The immense interest of these ensuing ten years to ourselves may be expressed by saying that they cover the whole Nelson period, ending with the battle of Trafalgar. In the whole of that struggle Prussia took no part at all.

§ 2. Frederick William III in the Napoleonic Wars

Frederick William II died in 1797, and was succeeded by Frederick William III, whose one idea was to avoid war, in which object he succeeded for a time. Austria was compelled to peace in 1797, and Britain was left to

carry on the war single-handed. A new coalition was formed in 1799 while Bonaparte was isolated in Egypt; Prussia stood aside. By the beginning of 1801 the second Coalition had been shattered, and in 1802 a general peace was established for fifteen months by the treaty of Amiens. In 1803 war was again declared between France and Britain. Through all these vicissitudes Prussia remained inactive. But in 1804 Napoleon murdered the Duc D'Enghien and assumed the title as well as the authority of Emperor. The Emperor Francis was nervous, the young Tsar Alexander of Russia was angry. The formation of a new coalition was imminent. A party had been growing up in Prussia which was by no means content with the very secondary position to which Prussia had been relegated by its pacific and politically timid monarch; a party which was soon to draw not so much leadership as inspiration from the beautiful, high-souled, and exceedingly feminine Queen Louise. Her time, however, had not yet come. Prussia did not join the Coalition between Austria, Russia and Britain, which came into being in 1805.

Yet she seemed to be upon the brink of doing so. For two years Napoleon had held his armies gathered at Boulogne for the invasion of England. In 1805, his admiral, Villeneuve, put to sea in order to carry out Napoleon's design of acquiring the mastery of the Channel. The attempt failed and ended with the destruction of the French fleet at Trafalgar. But at least two months before that decisive battle Napoleon had realised the hopelessness of his scheme. The grand army was suddenly hurled across Europe to annihilate the Austrian forces accumulated at Ulm. Its march involved the violation of the neutral Prussian territory of Anspach. This was too much even for Frederick William. He mobilised his troops and held a conference with the Tsar at Berlin, which culminated in the provisional treaty of Potsdam. Prussia was to offer Napoleon terms on behalf of Austria, and she was to join the Coalition unless the terms were accepted within the month. Yet the thing was futile. Napoleon

avoided giving the Prussian envoy any definite reply until he had inflicted a crushing defeat on the Austro-Russian army at Austerlitz. He did not want to quarrel with Prussia, so he proffered another treaty ; in return for her alliance he would make her a present of Hanover. Frederick rose at the bait, signed the treaty of Schönbrunn, and immediately found himself at war with England. Not many months elapsed before he was at war with Napoleon.

The queen and the war party were very ill-pleased with the treaty, as a blot upon the honour of Prussia. It was very soon obvious that Prussian honour had been sold for a shadow, when Napoleon organised the western states of Germany into what was practically the vassal Confederation of the Rhine, and made overtures to England which took no account of the promise that Prussia was to have possession of Hanover. This placed the war party in the ascendent. In October (1806) Prussia and France declared war. Prussia was without an effective ally, since Austria had been paralysed and neither England nor Russia was ready to give her present support. The result was a débâcle. The Prussian army was shattered at the battles of Jena and Auerstadt. Napoleon marched to Berlin ; Frederick William, rather than submit, retreated over the Russian frontier. A French campaign against the Russians followed, marked by two desperate battles at Eylau and Friedland. But meanwhile the Tsar's humour changed. Austria was a broken reed, and no effective assistance was forthcoming from England. He met Napoleon in a private conference at Tilsit, and the result was a transformation scene. The Tsar and the French emperor entered upon a close alliance. Frederick William, to whom Alexander certainly owed nothing, would have been reduced to the position of a minor prince of the Empire if the Tsar had not chosen to spare him in some degree. A new Grand Duchy of Warsaw was constituted out of his Polish provinces, and he found himself, with greatly diminished territories for all practical purposes a mere vassal of Napoleon.

Then there began in Prussia a process of regeneration, the work of ministers, Stein and Scharnhorst, whose appointment was sanctioned by Napoleon under a quite false impression of their character and capacity. The whole of the administrative and military systems were reorganised, the latter upon lines which made provision for a very large and effective army, though neither its size nor its efficiency were superficially apparent. At the same time the country was permeated by a fervid patriotic propaganda penetrating to every class. The result was manifested after the death of Queen Louise, when at the end of 1812 Napoleon returned from the fateful Moscow expedition with the shattered relics of his grand army. The impulse did not come from the Hohenzollern. It was the Prussian General Yorck who took upon himself the responsibility of breaking away from the subjection to Napoleon which was nominally an alliance with him. He stood aside with his troops and allowed the Russian armies to cross the Niemen as Prussia's liberator. The king, who would fain have stemmed the tide of popular feeling, now swiftly rising, was quickly forced to realise that any such attempt would be vain, so he allowed himself to be carried away by it. In February 1813 he signed a treaty with the Tsar. There was a national uprising ; the impulse spread beyond Prussia ; Europe rose against the Napoleonic tyranny ; Napoleon's armies were overwhelmed in the battle of the Nations at Leipzig ; he abdicated after a last desperate struggle, and was sent to retirement at Elba, while the Powers assembled at the Congress of Vienna to rearrange the map of Europe—as nearly as possible as though there had been no French Revolution and no Napoleon. Their activities were interrupted by Napoleon's final effort and final overthrow at Waterloo. The part played by Blücher and Prussia in that campaign emphasized the right she had recovered by her action in 1813–14 to take her stand beside Britain, Russia, and the Empire in deciding the settlement of Europe—a right which until 1813 she might well be held to have forfeited.

§ 3. Frederick William III after Waterloo

When Napoleon abdicated in 1814, and diplomacy set to work upon the materials which some twenty years of warfare had left at its disposal, it was confronted with highly complicated problems. Territories could not simply be reassorted and restored to the masters or the lineal representatives of the masters who had owned them before the fighting began. Also the ideas of the French Revolution had made impossible a simple restoration of the old social order. Penalties and compensations were called into play. Prussia obtained territorial extensions in West Germany which practically made her the guardian of German interests on the Rhine. "Secularised" ecclesiastical provinces were applied to compensate princes who were dispossessed of their former dominions. Legitimism, however, was the principle which actually triumphed in the settlement. Legitimism meant in effect the right of every dynasty to recover its old estates or their equivalent; there was no recognition of the principle of nationality, no idea that the population of any district was entitled to a voice in deciding who should be its ruler or how it should be ruled.

The Tsar Alexander I, a mystic in the true sense of the term, was an idealist; but unfortunately his ideals were not always compatible with each other. He had liberal ideals involving popular liberties, and a monarchical ideal according to which it was the first duty of the king's subjects to obey a prince who ruled over them by divine right, and who was himself responsible only to God. The monarchical ideal dominated the liberal ideal; but the liberal ideal was there. The resultant was the doctrine that kings ought to grant their subjects liberties, but as of grace not of right. The subjects had no right to claim them or to complain if the monarch, in his wisdom, thought fit to curtail them. But above all things the authority of the monarch was to be maintained. And all this issued in

the Holy Alliance, which Alexander designed to be a league of all Christian princes pledged to rule for the highest good of their subjects and to maintain each other's authority. But unfortunately the second clause was the only effectively binding one, because the prince and not his neighbour was the sole judge whether or not he was governing for the good of his subjects. So the princes pledged themselves with light hearts, and proceeded to govern strictly after their own devices. They promised their subjects constitutional liberties, but the promises rarely materialised ; it was nobody's business to see that they did materialise.

Practically the Tsar's Holy Alliance resolved itself into a league between Russia, Austria, and Prussia for the preservation of European peace by the suppression everywhere of movements hostile to the absolute authority of the various dynasts. The real director of that policy was not the Tsar, with his inconsistent ideals, but the Austrian minister Metternich, to whom every kind of liberal idea was anathema. The king of Prussia was personally an honourable gentleman of sincere piety ; but he was shortsighted, timid, and always under the direction of harder headed and generally unscrupulous persons, who knew their own minds. He quite intended to be the father of his people, but he was quite incapable of following an independent policy. Practically he took his orders from Metternich, and for the twenty-five years which passed between the battle of Waterloo and his death, Austria had Prussia behind her in supporting every reactionary government in Europe ; while within Germany the leadership of Austria was left virtually undisputed. Almost the only check on the reactionaries, except in Turkey where Russian interests happened to be engaged on the other side, was found in the British insistence on the doctrine of non-intervention as developed by Canning and Palmerston—supported by France after the fall of the Bourbon monarchy in 1830. We may here note that it was primarily British diplomacy which enabled Belgium to

separate herself from the kingdom of Holland, and secured for her in 1839 that guarantee of neutrality, from Prussia and other Powers, the validity of which was so fully recognised by all the Powers in 1870, only to be ruthlessly repudiated by another Hohenzollern in 1914.

The war of liberation had generated the idea of German unity among the peoples of Germany, but without influencing their rulers appreciably. Neither to the petty autocrats nor to Metternich did the idea of a centralised German Power appeal. The Germanic confederation constructed in 1815, of which both Prussia and Austria were members—saving their rights as separate European Powers—was utterly ineffective, and was in fact intended to be so. It was open to Prussia to take the position of leader of German nationalist sentiment, but Frederick William rejected his opportunity, as he rejected the opportunity of developing constitutionalism in Prussia. But as concerned the government of Prussia the tyranny which crushed all freedom of criticism and discussion was compatible with efficient administration ; and, without precisely intending it, the Prussian administration did in one direction tend very materially to the consolidation of German interests. It created the Zollverein or Customs Union. To the free-trader to-day a customs union appears as a protective organisation ; at the period we are studying it was precisely the opposite. Every petty state and every province of such a state as Prussia, which was in its nature a congeries of small states, had its own tariff wall. The removal of tariff walls within the state, the application of a single system to the whole, was the substitution of internal free trade for internal protection. But this did not get rid of the inconvenience caused by independent petty states surrounded by Prussian territory or intervening between Prussian territories. The Zollverein was formed by the gradual inclusion of these states in the Prussian system, the establishment of free trade within the Union, while uniform tariffs were maintained against the states which were not included. When Frederick

William II died the number of the German states which had come into the Zollverein was twenty-three; and the unification of their commercial interests, the common advantages derived from the Union, created and fostered that general sense of community of interests which ultimately provided the strongest inducement to political union—under the hegemony of Prussia, the creator of the system, not of Austria, which stood outside it altogether..

§ 4. *Frederick William IV*

When in 1840 Frederick William III was succeeded by his son Frederick William IV, it appeared for the moment that Prussia was to have a monarch with vigorous powers of initiative. The new king was a person of considerable brilliancy, but unfortunately of no stability. The hopes of constitutionalists were raised high by his apparently sincere desire to create a sound constitutional scheme based upon a thorough investigation of the best systems theoretical and practical, but they were ultimately dashed by his declaration in 1847 that no paper constitution would be regarded by him as binding, as an effective abrogation of the monarch's divinely ordained rights and responsibilities.

The February revolution of 1848 in France set revolutionary movements ablaze all over Europe, democratic or nationalist or both. Every state in Germany felt the movement. On every side the petty princes found themselves obliged to give way, to grant constitutions and democratic reforms. Frederick William was quick to yield to the storm, while his brother William, the heir-presumptive, and the recognised head of Prussian Conservatism, retired from the country. The reformers were both democratic and nationalist; that is, they demanded not only popular liberties, but a reconstruction of the Germanic confederation which should transform it into the Federated German nation.

The dream was destined to disappointment. Frederick William gave no real leadership. A German Parliament or Convention endeavoured to work out a new con-

stitution for Federated Germany ; and having resolved on the exclusion of Austria it offered Frederick William the crown of a new German Empire. The Prussian king, however, could not see his way. He had not shaken himself free of the traditional conception of the Empire with a Hapsburg at its head ; and the new constitution was alarmingly democratic. He refused the crown. The German Parliament had no power to enforce its decrees, and the plan collapsed. The first successes of the revolutionary movement were followed in Austria and elsewhere by victory for the reaction. Frederick William reverted to his former attitude. The advocates of German unity still remained divided between those who wished the exclusion of Austria and the recognition of Prussia as the head of Germany and those who desired the inclusion of Austria and her recognition as head. Frederick William had again had his chance and lost it. If he had ventured boldly to make Prussia take the lead in the championship of political liberty all the forces of German Liberalism would have combined to support him ; but when his government proved itself hardly less reactionary than that of Austria, it was clear that some new reason would have to be found for preferring Prussia to her rival as the head of Germany, and that another leader than Frederick William must be found to effect the change.

The disappointing reign of Frederick William was in effect closed in 1857, owing to his brain giving way. His brother William became regent, and exercised the functions of royalty on the king's behalf for a short time before he actually succeeded to the throne.

CHAPTER V

WILLIAM I AND BISMARCK

§ 1. *King William and Bismarck*

THE reign of William I begins virtually with his assumption of the regency in 1857, the year in which he reached the age of sixty. Old as he was he had a higher destiny

before him than any of his predecessors, except Frederick the Great. He had neither the brilliancy nor the instability of his brother ; his character bore a closer resemblance to that of his father, Frederick William III, though, with the addition of two invaluable characteristics—political courage and the instinct for recognising capacity and loyalty. He knew his own limitations. He knew himself for a soldier who understood the business of fighting. He knew that he was not a diplomatist, and that if once he found the right man to direct the policy of the state, his own business would be to trust that man and to support him at all costs, even though not himself convinced that the minister's policy was right. No one would have surmised, when the destinies of Prussia were placed in William's hand, that under his leadership she would become the most powerful state in Europe ; that he was to solve the problem of German unification, in regard to which his father and his brother had both so conspicuously failed.

The first years gave no very great promise. The Prince Regent, although until late in life he had been accounted a reactionary, chose more Liberal ministers than his brother ; but no one made the mistake of dreaming that he favoured anything in the nature of popular government. Probably he had no far-reaching designs in his mind. But as a soldier he very promptly made two appointments of supreme importance. Albert von Roon became his War Minister, and Moltke the Chief of the army. It was soon obvious, especially after his brother's death in January 1851 made him actually king, that he was bent on greatly increasing the military power of Prussia. Not perhaps with any specifically ambitious designs, but because he desired the voice of Prussia to count for at least as much as the voice of Austria, France, or England ; although England's interference in continental affairs was never likely to take the form of armed intervention.

Vain had been the hopes of Prussian Liberals in 1847 that they would obtain from Frederick William IV a constitution analogous to that of Great Britain, a Parlia-

ment in which, rather than in the Crown, the sovereignty of the state would be vested ; still there was a Prussian Parliament which enjoyed certain rights and looked upon itself as being able to extend those rights. The Prussian Parliament at this date was not imbued with the spirit of militarism, and saw no adequate reason for increasing the burden of military preparation. In the king's eyes, and in those of his War Minister Roon, the military reforms and expenditure proposed by the king were a sheer necessity. It became clear that the king could only get his way by exercising the royal prerogative and over-riding Parliament. William was resolved that the alternative to his military proposals was his own abdication ; his ministers were not prepared to support the Crown in over-riding Parliament. But Roon had found a man who was capable of playing Strafford to a king who had the courage to be loyal to him, which Charles I had lacked. Otto von Bismarck, Prussian Minister at Petersburg, had earlier shown himself an uncompromising supporter of the Crown. At Roon's instance Bismarck was recalled, and proved to be ready to undertake the dangerous task. Not without many misgivings, the king in effect placed himself in Bismarck's hands. From that time till William's death Bismarck ruled Prussia ; not by any means always as the king, left to himself, would have wished, but always with his loyal support.

Bismarck won a complete victory in the constitutional struggle. He faced the possibility of a revolution, but the revolution did not come. The Crown had the legal power of levying the money, and Bismarck ignored Parliament's technical right of controlling its expenditure. The scheme of army reorganisation was carried out, and provided him with the instrument which made his policy possible. That policy may be summed up as the development of the power of Prussia. Not primarily of Germany. Bismarck cared nothing for the idea of a united and powerful Germany in which Prussia should hold only a secondary position. If such an idea had been attainable, he would not have attempted

to attain it. But the unification of Germany was to be accomplished very definitely under the Prussian hegemony, because Prussia as the head of a united Germany would be infinitely more powerful than Prussia isolated. Herein lay the advance of Bismarck's ideal upon previous Hohenzollern ideals, including that of Frederick the Great. For in Frederick's time a united Germany had been out of reach; all that the great king could aim at was to make Prussia the greatest of the German states—so much the greatest that it should take rank with the great states of Europe. Further, no Hohenzollern except Frederick had hitherto been able to shake himself altogether free from the feeling that leadership among the German states must at best be shared by Prussia with Austria. Bismarck was perfectly clear that there was to be no sharing of leadership. Prussia must be supreme, and Prussia never could be altogether supreme until Austria should be excluded from Germany. Bismarck's German ambition to procure a powerful and united Germany was entirely secondary to his Prussian ambition; but followed upon it, because his Prussian ambition could only attain its highest if Prussia were the head of a united Germany, and at the same time the German ambition could only be fulfilled if Prussia were at the head of United Germany.

Austria then was the great obstacle externally. Internally, absolute power was the primary desideratum; the policy could not be carried out by a government subject to popular control. The very first necessity, an irresistible army, was only procurable by thrusting aside any attempts at popular control. But it was all the more necessary to manufacture popularity, to create favourable impressions, and to silence hostile criticism. An inspired Press which would teach the public what the Government wished it to believe, and the repression of an Opposition Press which would teach the public what the Government did not want it to believe, were necessary adjuncts. Bismarck practically created the system with which we are familiar, whereby the German public is permitted to know only those

facts which are convenient to the Government, and to accept as facts the fictions which the Government chooses to impose upon it.

§ 2. *Schleswig-Holstein*

The first need then of Bismarck's foreign policy was to weaken the influence of Austria in Germany and to cultivate friendly relations with the Powers most likely to come into collision with Austria, namely Russia, France, and the newly established kingdom of Italy. The first question which Bismarck was to turn to account was that of Poland. In 1863 Poland made its last desperate effort to break free from the Russian yoke. All Europe sympathised with the Poles; popular opinion did so in Prussia as well. But if Russian Poland, through the intervention of European Powers, should succeed in obtaining liberation, Prussian Poland would inevitably follow suit. King William, guided by Bismarck, sided with Russia; the Powers did not intervene as otherwise they might have done. Poland was crushed, but the friendship of Russia was secured for Prussia.

The next problem which presented itself, also in 1863, was that of Schleswig-Holstein; this too Bismarck turned to account. The question was one of extreme complexity. The duchy of Holstein was a principality of the Empire; the duchy of Schleswig was a part neither of the Empire nor of Denmark. Both duchies had for a very long period been attached to the Danish Crown. Schleswig, as well as Holstein, was more German than Danish, and the connection between the two duchies was extremely close. Now the Danish law of succession admitted females; the ducal law did not. The crown of the reigning king of Denmark was about to pass on in the female line. What was to happen to the duchies? There were sundry claimants, but no very decisive title. The King of Denmark obtained from the Powers by the treaty of London a guarantee of the integrity of his dominion, but the claim of the Duke of Augustenburg had not been definitely withdrawn; also the Danes did

not strictly carry out the pledges which had led up to the Treaty of London ; also the German princes in general had not individually or collectively ratified the treaty.

In 1863 the Danish king died and was succeeded by King Christian, whose daughter had just married the English Prince of Wales. Denmark wished to keep its hold on Schleswig-Holstein ; Schleswig-Holstein wished to be separated from Denmark ; the diet of the German Confederation wished for the separation, and the inclusion of the duchies in the Confederation. Frederick of Augustenburg revived his claim to the succession. Nearly all Germany approved his claim. But Prussia was a guarantor of the Treaty of London. Also Bismarck did not see how Prussia was going to gain by the Augustenburg succession. On the other hand, it was not difficult to maintain that Denmark had invalidated the obligations of the treaty of London by her own disregard of its provisions. Bismarck insisted, with the support of Austria but with great reluctance on the part of King William, that the Treaty of London must be maintained ; the Danes, however, must be required to conform to their own obligations—which they had no disposition to do.

Bismarck was going in the teeth of the diet, in the teeth of the Prussian Parliament, and in the teeth of very strong influences at the Prussian Court. But he had Austria with him. The result was that Prussia and Austria, as champions of the Treaty of London, pushed aside the diet ; and then, since King Christian refused to repeal the constitution which had been promulgated in contravention of the Treaty of London, Prussia and Austria attacked him, and, by a brief but very decisive campaign, occupied the duchies. Incidentally, the efficiency of the newly organised Prussian army was put to a highly satisfactory test.

It had now become Bismarck's determination to settle the legally undetermined question of the succession to the duchies by their annexation to Prussia—a solution which had also presented itself to the French Emperor, Napoleon III. But the other powers and

parties concerned were not easily to be persuaded either of the expediency or of the justice of this course. Bismarck, confident that Austria was entirely opposed to the Augustenburg succession, as he was himself, was embarrassed by finding that Austria preferred it to a Prussian annexation. But he failed to obtain from the claimant the conditions which he regarded as necessary to Prussian assent. Therefore he declared Prussia to be emphatically opposed to the Augustenburg succession, and brought up another claim on behalf of the Duke of Oldenburg.

No decision was arrived at by the diplomatists who wished to have a hand in the settlement ; hence the practical conclusion was that Austria and Prussia together dictated terms to the King of Denmark, who surrendered to the emperor and the king all his own rights in Schleswig-Holstein ; whereby it was left to those two Powers to maintain their joint claim as his assigns against other claimants and to adjust their own respective shares between themselves.

Now to Bismarck, adjustment meant simply that somehow Schleswig-Holstein was to be acquired by Prussia ; though even King William was not as yet thoroughly converted to his minister's ideas on that point. But beyond this the question was to be used as the lever for the ejection of Austria from Germany. It was a first principle with Bismarck to get rid of inconvenient agreements and pledges, not by breaking them, but by allowing or inveigling the adversary to commit himself to a breach of the letter of agreement, which would enable Prussia to claim that she had herself kept faith and could not be held responsible for a new situation which had thus been created. He was fully aware that the ascendancy of Prussia would not be attained and the ejection of Austria accomplished except at the cost of a war with Austria. A war with Austria must therefore be brought on ; but it must be under conditions which should ensure the victory to Prussia, and in which Austria should ostensibly be the aggressor. Bismarck's successors, it may be re-

marked, have sought to follow in his footsteps, but have lacked the master's thoroughness. They have been too hasty in assuming that victory was assured, and they have failed, as Bismarck never failed, to provide a plausible case for the claim that the quarrel has been forced on them by the aggression of their antagonist. Bismarck made sure of his ground, and then enticed his adversary into an overt act of aggression or breach of faith; William II has neglected to make sure of his ground and has entirely failed in the eyes of neutral countries to make good the charge of overt or even covert aggression against his adversaries.

Austria's plan for the treatment of Schleswig-Holstein was not to Bismarck's liking. She wanted to erect the duchies into a principality under Augustenburg, taking its place in the diet of the Confederation. Bismarck in the course of a long time produced the conditions under which Prussia was prepared to permit the erection of the duchies into a new state. The conditions obviously were never intended for acceptance. The outcome was the new Agreement of Gastein between Prussia and Austria, under which Austria withdrew her support from Augustenburg, while the administration of Schleswig was vested in Prussia and that of Holstein in Austria. Also both Powers undertook that the question should not be referred to the diet, which was distinctly on the side of Augustenburg. Thus Austria was induced to abdicate the position which she had hitherto endeavoured to preserve, of champion of the rights of the diet.

§ 3. *The Ejection of Austria*

The next step was to isolate Austria from possible allies. Bismarck was sure of Russia; he had to make sure of Napoleon III, who was generally credited with extreme craftiness and impenetrability. Bismarck's mask of recklessly blunt simplicity was an infinitely more effective weapon; he played with Napoleon and completely outwitted him. The Emperor promised neutrality in the event of war between Austria and

Prussia—under the impression that in the end Prussia would be obliged to appeal to him to save her from defeat, and that he would be able to dictate his own terms to the combatants. Bismarck could calculate upon British non-intervention; but from Italy he wanted something more. Italy could be rewarded for her support without any inconvenience to Prussia; she wanted Venetia and she should have it. Italian support would provide a useful diversion on Austria's flank—at least unless Austria should prefer to buy her off by the cession of Venetia. Bismarck secured the Italian alliance and profited by Italian loyalty; for when the crisis came, Austria offered in effect to buy her off at her own price, but she refused to make terms apart from her ally.

Bismarck was deliberately working to bring on a war with Austria, not merely for the sake of Schleswig-Holstein but with the object of securing an indisputable Prussian supremacy in Germany. But he had to carry the king with him; whereas the king did not want war, and was still imbued with a sentiment of loyalty to Austria. William, perhaps more than anyone else, had to be persuaded that Austria not Prussia was the aggressor. The task was difficult, but Bismarck succeeded. Ostensibly the cause of friction was the Austrian administration in Holstein, which, by its leniency and the favour shown to the Augustenburgers, embarrassed the repressive Prussian policy in Schleswig. Bismarck apparently only complicated matters the more by a startling suggestion for reforming the constitution of the Confederation by introducing manhood suffrage. His own belief probably was that the democratic vote would strengthen monarchy as against middle-class constitutionalism; but the proposal was generally alarming to crowned heads and to aristocrats, and in Germany and the diet the isolation of Prussia was made the more marked.

Thus Austria was induced to play into Bismarck's hands. In spite of the terms of the treaty of Gastein she brought the question of the duchies before the diet.

Treating this as a definite breach of the treaty, Bismarck ordered Prussian troops to enter Holstein. Austria called upon the diet to mobilise the federal forces in her defence. The majority of the diet supported Austria. Prussia, declaring this to be in contravention of the federal law, withdrew from the Confederation, and declared war upon all the states which supported Austria, treating as supporters of Austria all those which refused their active alliance to Prussia.

The Seven Weeks' War which followed put the Prussian military machine to a decisive and triumphant test. It was ready for war, and struck before hostile forces could be set in motion. The first movement of troops was made on June 15th 1866. In a fortnight, opposition in Western Germany had been completely crushed. On July 2nd the Austrian army was completely shattered at the battle of Sadowa or Königgrätz. It was of no practical consequence that the Italians were badly beaten at Custoza. Napoleon intervened, but he had been completely surprised by the rapidity of the Prussian victory, and was not ready for war. Guided by Bismarck, King William signified his readiness to accept French mediation, but while negotiations were in progress, the Prussian armies continued to advance. Bismarck, however, made haste to formulate terms such as Austria might be willing to accept without reference to a European Congress.

Those terms were studiously moderate. Italy was to have Venetia—as Napoleon himself would have been obliged to require. Prussia was to have Schleswig-Holstein; that was the palpably inevitable consequence of Sadowa. The other conditions were concerned with the internal affairs of Germany, as to which no other Powers could claim any right to interfere. The attitude adopted by the King of Hanover warranted insistence upon the annexation of Hanover. But in nothing was Bismarck's sanity more distinctively demonstrated than in his abstention from an immediate attempt to assert the Prussian hegemony of all Germany. The old Confederation was to be dissolved, but Germany was to

be divided into north and south, the new North German Confederation being under the Prussian supremacy, while Bavaria, Würtemberg, and Baden remained outside. Bismarck knew that as yet the inclusion of those states would be a source of weakness not of strength to the new Confederation. All the demands were such that neither Napoleon nor any of the other Powers could plausibly resist them ; that Austria could only recognise their moderation ; and that the King of Prussia himself could advance them without any violation of his own conscientious dislike to an attitude of active hostility to Austria. The suggestions, made too late by Napoleon, for compensation to France by way of balance to the Prussian annexations, were utilised only to impress upon the South German states that Bismarck, not Napoleon, was their real friend. The French Emperor had lost the chance of appearing as a mediator in Germany ; if he claimed anything for himself, all Germany would be against him.

Bismarck's triumph was complete. He had justified to Prussia the measures which had been carried out in defiance of the Prussian Parliament. He had, in effect, made a single dominion of all North Germany. He had settled the question of Austro-Prussian rivalry ; and he had completely established his personal supremacy both with the nation and with the king. And this last effect was completed when, instead of simply continuing to override the constitution, he rectified the constitutional position by procuring an Act of indemnity from the Parliament for the emergency measures which had been carried out in disregard of constitutional forms. Thus he brought over to his side the body of constitutionalists who became known as the National Liberals.

§ 4. *The Crushing of France*

The constitution of the new North German Confederation was essentially that of the new German Empire when it came into being. Under the presidency of the King of Prussia there was a Federal Council which had

complete control of the Federal Executive and was the source of legislation ; also there was a Federal Assembly, the Reichstag, elected by universal suffrage, which could criticise but could not initiate legislation, could refuse new taxes, but had no control over the executive. On the other hand the Prussian system of universal military service was applied throughout the whole ; for all practical purposes the army was the army of the King of Prussia. In effect the foreign policy of the whole was the policy of a single state, and was controlled by Prussia. Bismarck had not only brought about this immense change in Germany, but the new constitution was actually his own personal creation. It remained only to induce the states which were still outside to enter the Confederation voluntarily, but at the moment which should seem good to Bismarck. Only when this was accomplished would Prussia be able to wield the whole force of Germany.

One obstacle remained to the completion of consolidation. A consolidated Germany was a phenomenon with which France had never before been faced. Her efforts at expansion had always been at the expense of a disunited Germany. In effect a new Power had now been created whose development would stand in the way of the traditional ideas of French expansion. The ambitions in which Napoleon III had permitted himself to indulge, ambitions whose fulfilment was almost a condition necessary to the continuity of the Napoleonic empire, were incompatible with the development of the new German power. Sooner or later there would be a collision. Napoleon knew that unless he could get the better of the new Power his dynasty would be unable to retain its hold on the French people. He did not want the struggle, but he was not strong enough to avert it. It was Bismarck's business to see not only that he did not avert it, but that he should be made responsible for bringing it on ; also that he should do so at a moment when Prussia would be assured of victory.

A prolonged delay would not have suited Bismarck. The Crown Prince had always displayed liberal ten-

dencies and had repeatedly shown dislike to the policy of the minister. Though Bismarck had made sure of the king, it was impossible for him to assume that William still had a long lease of life before him after he had reached the age of seventy ; and the accession of the Crown Prince might bring the Chancellor's power to an end. Yet time was needed in order to bring on the contest with France at a favourable moment.

The chance came in 1870 ; it was provided by a vacancy on the Spanish throne. It may be surmised that it would have been provided by something else if the Spanish throne had not become vacant. The Spaniards in 1868 deposed the reigning queen Isabella ; the victorious party did not want a republic ; but it was not easy to find any Catholic prince in Europe to whom the crown of Spain appeared as a desirable prize. But a personally suitable candidate was found in Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, of a younger branch of the house of Prussia, a Roman Catholic, whose younger brother had recently been placed on the throne of Roumania. Incidentally the family was also connected with the Bonapartes. The prince was more or less willing, but Napoleon was not. The prince's family had displayed a peculiarly emphatic loyalty to the Prussian branch, and Napoleon was quite warranted in regarding his accession to the throne of Spain as a possible danger to France in the existing circumstances.

The prince would seem to have been extremely doubtful when the offer of the Spanish crown was first made to him tentatively during 1869 ; he was not prepared to accept it without the assent both of King William and of Napoleon. But by the beginning of 1870 Bismarck had made up his mind to support Leopold's candidature. Yet although he urged the great political advantage of placing a Hohenzollern on the Spanish throne, he could extract only a very unwilling assent from the king, which did not suffice to overcome the reluctance of the prince. It was not till June that Bismarck succeeded in persuading Leopold to accept the Spanish offer, subject to the assent of King William,

which was immediately granted. All the negotiations, however, had so far been secret. If the Spanish Cortes had at once proceeded to elect Leopold to the throne, France could hardly have interfered after the accomplished fact. So far, Bismarck's design had simply been to capture the Spanish alliance and thus to strengthen the hand of Prussia against France when the war should come. He did not intend the Spanish affair to provide the actual *casus belli*.

The plan broke down, because the Cortes instead of proceeding at once to the election, was adjourned. The secret leaked out. France could quite legitimately call upon the King of Prussia to refuse his assent to his kinsman's candidature, though she could not have demanded Leopold's retirement after Spain had elected him. The French protest could only be directed to the King of Prussia. The protest was one which William could not resist. European public opinion, public opinion in South Germany, would emphatically condemn him if he imperilled the peace of Europe for the advancement of a member of his own family. It is to be observed that the existing situation had been brought about in spite of the king's personal disinclination, and of manifest reluctance on the part of the prince, who very judiciously sought to clear the air by announcing the withdrawal of his candidature; which William at once approved.

For Bismarck this was a serious rebuff. But the French proceeded to deliver themselves into his hand. Instead of being content with the diplomatic victory, the Ministry made the further unwarrantable demand that William should undertake never again to authorise his kinsman's candidature; and the demand was pressed in such a manner, and with such an accompaniment of excited language in Paris, that the Prussian king's only possible reply was to the effect that he had already given his unqualified approval to the prince's withdrawal and that the matter was at an end so far as he was concerned.

It is possible that the matter would have ended

there but for Bismarck, as that statesman himself affirmed in later years. But the precise situation had arisen which Bismarck desired. He was confident that in a simple duel between France and Prussia, Prussia would win decisively. As matters stood France could not hope for active support from Italy, because of the relations between the Italian kingdom and the Papacy, and the attitude of the dominant clerical party in Paris which was also the War party. Austria would not move because in spite of her ill-will to Prussia she was in the first place not ready to strike, and was in the second place afraid to move lest Russia should take the opportunity of attacking her. The neutrality of Gladstone's Government in England could be relied on, unless either France or Prussia should violate the neutrality of Belgium. All this would not have been enough to warrant active aggression on the part of Prussia ; that would have set South Germany against her. But if the act of wanton aggression came from France, South Germany would throw in its lot with Prussia. A declaration of war by France with no better basis than the Prussian king's declaration that the Spanish incident was closed would be just the piece of wanton aggression which Bismarck desired. Probably it would have come in any case, but Bismarck made it certain. There was a hot-headed war party in Paris ; the war fever had been fomented by the Press ; the Emperor did not dare to resist. The smallest additional impetus would be decisive. He received for publication an account of the interviews between the king and the French ambassador Benedetti on July 13th. The telegram, condensed and edited by Bismarck, was published in the North German Press on that night and the following morning, accompanied by numerous embroidering articles. The edited telegram did not as a matter of fact depart materially from the document which Bismarck had received, but it did convey an intensified impression of an irreparable breach between the king and the ambassador. The wrath of Paris boiled over. On July 15th the French

Chamber of Deputies was passing war votes, and the mobilisation of the North German troops was ordered.

We need not follow in detail the military events of the Franco-German war. They provided a complete demonstration of the perfection of the German military machine, and a revelation of the incompetence, and worse than incompetence, of the French administration. The first actual collision took place at Saarbruck on August 3rd, and was announced as a great French victory. A month later the French Emperor was forced to surrender at Sedan with 80,000 men. On September 20th the investment of Paris began. On October 28th Bazaine surrendered at Metz with 170,000 men. On January 28th 1871 Paris capitulated; in February peace preliminaries were signed, and in May the definitive peace was made.

Bismarck had practically depended on the neutrality of the rest of Europe and on South Germany's vigorous participation in the war. Although the South German states had not been admitted to the North German Confederation, treaties had been made with them for the association of their armies with those of Prussia, and they had all entered the Customs Union. It had been the object of the Prussian Chancellor to make the complete consolidation of a German Empire a deliberate and voluntary act, with no suspicion of compulsion about it, and arising from an overmastering sense of common interests. The coping-stone was provided by the war in which Bavarian Catholics and Würtemberg democrats fought side by side with the Protestant subjects of Prussian autocracy. On January 18th, before the fall of Paris, King William of Prussia was acclaimed German Emperor at Versailles by the princes, ministers, and generals of the states of Germany.

Again the achievement was Bismarck's. William was reluctant to substitute the new title for that of King of Prussia; as an alternative he would have preferred the more authoritative title of Emperor of Germany. The kings of Bavaria and Würtemberg demanded the retention of privileges which the Crown

Prince disliked. It was the wisdom of Bismarck which induced the Hohenzollerns to subordinate their personal sentiments to the keener judgment which insisted on conciliating the sentiments or prejudices of the other princes. The modern German Empire, not a revival, but a new birth, for the first time in history gave concrete form to the conception of German unity. The German Empire is professedly Christian—yet it would seem to have returned unconsciously to the peculiar paganism which eighteen centuries earlier actually deified the conception of the State as “*Diva Roma*,” incarnate in the person of “*Divus Augustus*.” But, for Bismarck, it was just that supreme triumph of Prussia for which he had been working since 1862. Prussia armed in the German panoply stood out as the first military Power in Europe.

The settlement of the terms of peace followed upon the birth of the new German Empire and the capitulation of Paris. In that settlement also, Bismarck exercised a moderating influence; but he was resolved that Germany should dictate the terms regardless of any foreign intervention. In fact, no foreign Power would have ventured to intervene in arms, except conceivably Russia; and Bismarck made sure of Russia by supporting if not suggesting the demands which she put forward at this moment for the abrogation of clauses obnoxious to her in the treaty which had concluded the Crimean War. The Gladstone Government in England might and did urge moderation; Bismarck resented the fact, but knew perfectly well that British intervention would go no further than protestations. While Russia was friendly to Prussia, there was nothing to fear from Austria. But the foes of Bismarck's moderation were those of his own household. He wanted territory from France; but, as a statesman, he did not wish to have a huge number of Frenchmen forcibly converted into German subjects. The judgment of the statesman was over-ridden by the opinion of the military advisers which appealed with peculiar force to King William. They insisted on the cession of Metz along with Alsace-

Lorraine ; Bismarck was undoubtedly relieved when they gave way on the question of the surrender of another entirely French town, Belfort. It is said that it was partly owing to British influence that a reduction was made in the huge war indemnity originally demanded from France—another item in the account against England. The warning from Russia, that the demand for the cession of Alsace-Lorraine would create a sore which could never be healed, was disregarded.

§ 5. *The New German Empire*

The triumph was Bismarck's, but beside Bismarck stood the old king and new emperor, whom he had served so successfully and who shared the credit as well as the fruits of that success. For yet seventeen years more they remained side by side, loyal always to each other and to their common country. Whatever the personal ambitions of either man may have been, each was ready to toil to the uttermost for the welfare of the State ; to both of them, as to Frederick the Great, the welfare of the State, no merely personal object, was the supreme end to which all else was subordinated.

Bismarck had led his master into one war after another—the Danish war, the Austrian war, the French war. If results can justify, each war was justified by a substantial accession of strength to Prussia, and finally to Germany. Nor could it be said in any of the three cases that the war was one of wanton aggression. In each case there was at least technical justification, even if that technical justification had been partly the product of Bismarck's own dexterity. The disablement of France was the necessary condition of the consolidation of Germany, because the France of Napoleon III was positively hostile to the consolidation of Germany. The exclusion of Austria as a rival for the hegemony of Germany was a condition of the Prussian supremacy without which a consolidated Germany was impossible ; as in Frederick the Great's day, the expansion of Prussia had been the condition lacking which she could not

take her place among the dominant powers of Europe. Now that Bismarck had definitely raised United Germany to the position of the greatest military Power in Europe, he had no more use for aggressive warfare waged on the pretext of self-defence. He wanted not war but peace, peace guaranteed by the certainty that no one would willingly attack Germany. His business was to cement the fabric of the German Empire which he had reared with blood and iron. Bismarck's foreign policy was thenceforth directed not to the injuring or weakening of any foreign nation, but to ensuring that none should be able to threaten German interests. So far as he permitted sentiment to influence his politics at all, he took a pleasure in thwarting England because England had annoyed him in 1871. But mere sentiment never roused him to active hostility; British interests did not collide with German interests just then. He had settled the account with France for at least a generation. There was no more possibility of Austrian rivalry within Germany, and since that was precluded, Austrian interests outside did not clash with German interests. There remained Russia, with which it was much better to be on friendly than on hostile terms. The interest of Germany, therefore, was to cultivate friendly relations both with Austria and with Russia, and to act as "the honest broker," a friendly moderator with no interests of his own at stake, when the interests of those two Powers clashed.

The identification of German and Austrian interests took the place of the old antagonism between Austrian and Prussian interests; it became less easy to maintain intimate friendship with Russia, and the time arrived when the consolidation of alliance between the three central European Powers became necessary as a security against the possible conjunction of Russia with France; but Bismarck always retained the desire for friendly relations between the three Kaisers, provided always that German interests did not suffer thereby. But always the first necessity remained the same. The German army must always be palpably so strong that

no enemy would willingly try conclusions with it ; and it must always be ready to strike in full force before any enemy could meet it in full force.

New needs, however, began to present themselves. If Germany was to hold her place as the first of military states, her wealth must be developed and the enterprise of her people must be fostered. Within a few years of the establishment of the German Empire, she was craving for colonial expansion ; and Bismarck had resolved to reverse the fiscal policy based upon free trade doctrines which had been consistently followed for many years past. Like the early Hohenzollerns, he desired the German Empire to be self-supporting, a necessity in time of war for a country whose naval power was insignificant, since an enemy with a fleet could cut off her imports. She must be enabled to produce what other countries could supply more cheaply ; to her the protection of the producer was of more importance than cheapness to the consumer. The economic wisdom or otherwise of the new policy does not here concern us, but only the fact that it was a new policy, intended to enable German goods to compete effectively with British goods in particular—with what had hitherto been British monopolies.

It became the ambition of Germany to capture British markets. Incidentally it became her desire to crush the competitor. For the free-trade country, which looks first to the interest of the consumer, approves of competition ; the protectionist country, which thinks first of the interests of the producer, seeks to preclude competition. And Germany, desiring to damage if not to destroy British trade, has taken for granted ever since the competition began that Britain desires to destroy German trade, oblivious of the fact that had she so desired she would have called protectionist governments into power and kept them there. The protectionist policy directed to the development of German trade was accompanied by a policy of colonial expansion, partly with the same object in view, partly as an outlet for Germany's rapidly increasing popu-

lation. Here, Bismarck declined to go to the lengths desired by the enthusiasts. He preferred the traditional British method of colonisation by private enterprise under State sanction to colonisation directed by the State itself. And he was unwilling to incur British hostility for the sake of an expansion of whose profitability he was not thoroughly convinced.

The old Kaiser to the day of his death, before which he had completed his ninetieth year, remained unshakably loyal to his great minister; even when he differed with him he refused absolutely to permit his resignation. It was anticipated that his death and the accession of his son Frederick—Frederick III of Prussia, Frederick I of the new German Empire—would involve the fall of the Chancellor. But the new Emperor was already a dying man when he succeeded his father in March 1888. During the three months of life which were left to him, harmony was retained between emperor and chancellor; though there can be little doubt that Frederick would have inaugurated considerable departures from the old policy within the Empire if he had been able to look forward to a long and active life. But he died in June, and William II his son reigned in his stead.

CHAPTER VI

KAISER WILLIAM II

§ 1. *The Close of the Century*

THE new Kaiser was a young man of eight-and-twenty, versatile, ambitious, and utterly self-confident, an incarnate exaggeration, who saw everything, especially himself, as through a magnifying glass. He had no intention of following his grandfather's example and submitting himself to the guidance of a man whose genius he recognised as greater than his own. The Kaiser was not to be overshadowed by the Minister. He was satisfied that he understood Bismarck's policy,

his grandfather's policy, and the way to carry it out, better than Bismarck himself. Eighteen months after his accession, at the beginning of 1890, he "dropped the pilot," who was only too unwilling to surrender the power which he had held so long. William intended his ministers to be very emphatically his servants and subordinates, instruments for carrying out his own will; it was impossible for him to work in harmony with a man of overwhelmingly strong convictions and independent judgment, accustomed to the exercise of an absolute authority by twenty years of power.

Germany for the last five-and-twenty years has persuaded itself that its policy was simply Bismarck's policy adapted to altered conditions, a world-policy reproducing what was a strictly European policy. As a matter of fact the Kaiser has completely departed from the two models which he seems to have set before himself, Frederick the Great and a William I with the attributes of Bismarck—or a Bismarck identified with William I. Frederick and Bismarck aimed at power, not at dominion. Their ideals have been corrupted in their successor by a Napoleonic admixture. The Kaiser and his people took hold of the idea that it was Germany's destiny to dominate the world; and along with this idea was implanted the conviction that the world was engaged in a conspiracy for the destruction of Germany. Because Britain appeared to stand in the way of German commercial and colonial development, inasmuch as she had already annexed the most desirable portions of the earth's surface and a preponderant proportion of the world's trade, the Kaiser and Germany became convinced that Britain was the creator and manager of the anti-German world conspiracy. This was the obsession which controlled, not immediately but indirectly, the policy which has produced the great war of 1914.

This conception, however, had not yet thoroughly taken root during the first years of the Kaiser's reign. British foreign policy, whether under the direction of Lord Salisbury or of Lord Rosebery, could not easily be regarded as veiling a Machiavellian search for alliances

against Germany. Moreover, Lord Salisbury had been associated with Lord Beaconsfield and his anti-Russian policy at the time of the Berlin Congress ; there was no apparent probability of a warm friendship springing up between Great Britain, France and Russia ; an Anglo-French *rapprochement* was presently made the more unlikely by the Fashoda incident. As yet the birth of the great conspiracy was unsuspected. It was an isolated England which the Kaiser viewed with a hostility born of his primitive antagonism to his mother's family. Similarly the hostility of the Kaiser's subjects to Queen Victoria's subjects was as yet the product only of that colonial and commercial rivalry to which the Germans were so keenly alive and the British public was for the most part so placidly blind. The British colonies (which had not yet learnt to regard that term as derogatory) were less obtuse than the population of the British Isles. The Anglo-German agreement with regard to Africa in 1890 was regarded by the slowly-developing school of British Imperialists as a surrender to Germany ; while the German expansionists regarded it as a pitiable diplomatic fiasco for their own side. As a matter of fact, though there might be differences of opinion with regard to details, it was, taken as a whole, a very reasonable compromise between conflicting interests. But it helped to increase in Germany the conviction that Great Britain was hostile to German expansion.

The agreement did not prove so immediately productive of wealth for Germany as had been anticipated ; and the Kaiser turned his eyes to South Africa, where the relations between the Imperial Government and the Boer Republics were strained. Through association with the Boers, it might be that a German ascendancy might displace that of the British. The Jameson Raid produced from the Kaiser a telegram to the Transvaal President which created more than a mild excitement in England and at the Cape. Still the definite explosion, the struggle between Boer and Briton, was postponed. When it definitely came, England was in a state of

complete isolation ; the nations of the European Continent vied with each other in denouncing her tyranny, and in manufacturing mythical tales of the iniquities perpetrated by her. The German apologists claim that the Kaiser now showed his magnanimity, and his truly pacific character. It was he, they say, that kept the peace, and saved England from falling a prey to a European combination. But the plain fact is—first, that co-operation between France and Germany would have been a very risky experiment, and, secondly, that the situation caused the Kaiser to realise the fundamental truth that England could not fall a prey to any Power or any combination of Powers until her naval supremacy could be challenged. She could strike no blow in Europe, but no blow could be struck at her anywhere unless it might be by Russia in Asia. So the Kaiser kept the peace ; content on the whole with the conviction that when the time should come for Germany to try conclusions with Great Britain, a rebellion in South Africa would have a paralysing effect upon her. William II was somewhat dangerously given to the indulgence of momentary impulses productive of startling stage effects. But he had one of the qualities of a great man. He knew how to bide his time. And he did not in 1899 fall into the blunder of imagining that his time had come.

One lesson at least he had taken to heart. For a purely European policy on the European Continent the German army was so organised that it could, if called upon, bring to bear every ounce of the German fighting power with the maximum of effect. But for a world policy, an overseas policy, it could not be brought into effective action without a navy. A tentative movement in the direction of a naval programme had been made in 1897 ; but it was in 1900 that the Kaiser definitely asserted Germany's new rôle. She was to become what she had never been before, a great Sea Power, and she was to press forward at full speed with the creation of a navy of the highest class. Still England declined to take alarm, since she could have no sort of

difficulty in maintaining an overwhelming preponderance in view of the enormous start which she already possessed.

§ 3. *Inflation*

Now let us observe that until the close of the nineteenth century it would have been absolutely impossible to credit the myth of an anti-German conspiracy among the Powers external to the Triple Alliance. Britain and Russia as Asiatic Powers had lived in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion, verging at least on active hostility, for three-quarters of a century. Egypt was an almost ceaseless source of friction between Britain and France. But in the first years of the twentieth century some remarkable changes were taking place. Russia plunged into the unhappy Japanese war with two results, one immediately and the other not immediately apparent. First, England, as well as more than half of Europe, had hitherto regarded the Russian military power as a standing menace. Europe and England felt a sudden relief when big Russia failed to crush little Japan, and England began to believe in the possibility of arriving at an understanding with Russia in Asia. The second result was that Russia herself silently set about the task of reorganisation, while outwardly she ceased to rely upon the aggressive methods of diplomacy which had served her in such good stead when the world was overrating instead of underrating her power.

A second change was the sudden and wholly unexpected development of a Tariff Reform campaign in England. In that campaign one of the most prominent features was the doctrine that British trade could only be saved from complete destruction by the exclusion from the British market of German competition. An immense impulse was given thereby to the German conviction, for which there had hitherto been little enough ground, that the British nation was violently jealous of German commerce, and was bent upon its destruction.

A third change was that in the relations between England and France. In 1904, Anglo-French diplomacy at last achieved a settlement, satisfactory to both nations, of the whole group of outstanding differences and causes of friction between the two nations. And along with the severely practical adjustment of conflicting interests there came a sentimental revolution directly due to the personal popularity achieved by King Edward VII on a visit to France, creating an unprecedented atmosphere of goodwill.

France, now reconciled with England, was already associated on exceedingly friendly terms with Russia ; and an accommodation between England and Russia had been brought within the range of practical politics by the Russo-Japanese war and the obvious disinclination of Russia to embark upon fresh adventures in Asia. Individually, each of these three powers had interests which clashed with those of the Triple Alliance or at least of the two Germanic Powers ; Russia as the chief of the Slavonic peoples, France because of Alsace-Lorraine, England because Germany was threatening her commercial supremacy. The myth had become credible. The three powers, it seemed, had settled, or were on the point of settling, their differences. Germany was not to be deceived by the simple explanation that they preferred living rationally on terms of friendship instead of on terms of suspicion ; the real motive of their accommodation must be their common desire to crush a peaceable and harmless Germany. France might be excused ; it was natural that the loss of her provinces should rankle. Russia might be excused ; the Slav was inferior to the Teuton, but it was intelligible that he should object to acknowledging his inferiority. But for England there was no excuse. She was pursuing no great political ideals ; she was merely wickedly jealous because her pocket was affected by the legitimate enterprise of her German competitors. The conclusion was obvious, that England was at the bottom of the conspiracy ; England was *par excellence* the enemy.

Now if this postulate were once granted, if the Entente of the three Powers was, in fact, a conspiracy concocted by England and directed to the destruction of Germany, it was clearly necessary that Germany should make herself absolutely ready to meet the combined attack, and, like Frederick in 1756, to strike a blow at the encircling enemies before they were ready, which would make it impossible for them to carry out their nefarious designs. It was absolutely necessary to build up a fleet strong enough to dispute the complete supremacy of the British Fleet. That had, in fact, been a condition of any successful collision with England, a contingency for which the German naval programme of 1900 was an obvious preparation. It did not imply the intention of challenging England, but, ostensibly, only the determination to be ready to meet the challenge. And the plan was facilitated by that departure in naval armaments inaugurated by the launching of the Dreadnought in 1906. The new battleship was so incomparably more powerful than any which had hitherto been built that it seemed probable that the relative strength of navies in the future would be calculated simply in terms of the number of their Dreadnoughts. As concerned the rest of the fleet, England's huge lead could hardly be overtaken; as concerned Dreadnoughts, the two Powers were starting almost level.

The menace to British sea power from the development of the German fleet on these lines was much greater than it had been before, and made it much more emphatically necessary that British naval programmes should be regulated directly by the German naval programme, with a view to preserving at least that superiority which was necessary to the security of the maritime Power. At the same time it could be represented officially and to the German people that expenditure on the German Navy was purely defensive, and had no other object than the adequate defence of German commerce in the event of war with a maritime Power. The German Navy, like the German army, in

the hands of a wholly peaceful and unaggressive Power, was to be regarded simply as an additional guarantee of European peace.

The German enthusiasm for peace was not altogether convincing. The Kaiser was given to expressing himself in extremely martial phraseology. He had made somewhat notorious references to the "mailed fist," and, as a shining exemplar, to Attila, the "scourge of God," but the world was inclined to regard such outbursts on his part as merely impulsive eccentricities.

Everyone knew that there existed in Germany a blatantly bellicose party. And most people believed that the Kaiser personally viewed it with disfavour, that he knew peace to be the true interest of Germany, and that Germany's warlike preparations were really actuated mainly by an exaggerated dread of dangers which did not really threaten her, if also intended in part to keep the Chauvinists quiet. It was not generally perceived that the German people were firmly convinced that self-defence, not aggression, was the object which their Government had in view, and that if that Government should lead them into war, the conviction would remain unshaken. In the course of time the Government was to furnish conclusive evidence that, like Bismarck in the sixties, it was planning to bring on war at its own time; but the evidence was not produced till it was too late for the German people to give it even cursory consideration; so that in 1914, nine-tenths of them believed wholeheartedly that the Kaiser had done his best to avert a war which was forced upon him.

It was curious, however, that this most pacific Power was stolidly and immovably opposed to any and every attempt to diminish the pressure of rivalry in armaments, or to extend the principle of referring international disputes to arbitration. She would at no time have anything to say to British suggestions for agreed limitations on naval programmes.

In 1907 Britain and Russia arrived at their own mutual settlement of outstanding differences. The Triple Entente was confirmed. In the next year Austria

announced her intention of overriding treaties and transforming her occupation of Bosnia into annexation. Russia protested; the Kaiser announced his readiness to take his stand by his Austrian ally in "shining armour." Russia gave way, and the German Powers scored a diplomatic triumph which went far to satisfy them as to their own strength and the disinclination of the Entente Powers to be drawn into a huge general war.

The next stage was the diplomatic attempt, appreciated only by diplomatists not by the public at large, to dissolve the Triple Entente by detaching Great Britain from it—an attempt scarcely consistent with the belief so carefully engendered in the German people that the Entente was a conspiracy engineered by Machiavellian British diplomacy for the destruction of Germany. The British attitude was clear and straightforward. England would be glad to clear up any misunderstandings and to settle any differences with Germany which existed, provided that such settlements were in conformity with her actual obligations to other Powers. Also she would be glad to use her good offices in helping to reconcile differences between her friends and Germany. But this was not enough for Germany. What she asked for was in effect a pledge that Great Britain would stand neutral in any quarrel between Germany and another Power. Britain declined to pledge herself to neutrality in case of an attack not wantonly provoked by the Entente Powers—who were perfectly well aware that she would not support them in acts of unprovoked aggression. The negotiations naturally collapsed.

An attempt to break up a coalition supposed to be hostile or sub-hostile is obviously legitimate and does not of itself imply an aggressive intention, although in this particular case the demand for British neutrality in any circumstances was more than suspicious.

In 1911 there came another move, intended at least to test the efficacy of the Entente. Germany declared that French action in Morocco exceeded

France's treaty rights and was injurious to Germany; she sent a warship to Agadir. She ascertained thereby that if she made the question a *casus belli* with France her action would be regarded by England as a piece of wanton aggression incompatible with British neutrality. There is no doubt that war was barely averted. The Kaiser found reason to believe that the moment was unfavourable. A way of retreat was offered which saved German credit, though it was impossible to conceal the fact of a German rebuff. Still the German Government could again claim credit with the German people for its pacific conduct under grave provocation. Also it could point to the incident as a proof that Sir Edward Grey had bound England and France closely together, in spite of official statements that there was no treaty binding the two Powers to support each other in the event of war. Here was fresh corroboration of the conspiracy myth for German minds.

The next episode presents itself with the great Balkan War, an episode which must have satisfied everyone in Europe who was well or even decently informed politically that the cause of European peace had no champion more sincere, more devoted, more strenuous, and more disinterested than the British Foreign Secretary. Very emphatically he took the line that in dealing with the Balkan problem, the Powers ought not to regard themselves as two hostile groups with antagonistic interests, striving to get the better of each other, but as a single group whose common interest it was to obtain the fairest possible adjustment of all difficulties. None of the other Powers indeed were anxious for war, yet it was mainly Sir Edward's skill and obvious sincerity which smoothed away difficulties and produced harmony. Yet in 1914 it was to become evident that the Kaiser and his advisers had succeeded in misreading Sir Edward's character. They did not, because they could not, believe in the mythical plotter who was encircling Germany with the toils of France and Russia. But they saw that he believed intensely that peace was Great Britain's first material

interest ; and in spite of the Moroccan affair in 1911 they failed to realise that something besides immediate material interests may be taken into account by British statesmen.

And in 1914 the Kaiser conceived that the hour for which he had waited so long had arrived. Russia, it was supposed, had not yet set her military organisation in order. The assassination of the Austrian heir-apparent gave the opportunity for Austria to assume a dictatorial attitude towards Servia, which would compel Russia either to interfere or to submit to the permanent ascendancy of Austria over the Slavonic peoples of the Balkan Peninsula. A very slight modification of the Austrian demands would have sufficed to save the situation. Without that slight modification, Russia, who had given way in 1908, must either submit to intolerable humiliation or go to war with Austria. War between Russia and Austria, if it involved Germany, would also involve France ; the Kaiser had persuaded himself that it would not involve England, and that Belgium would yield to the threat of coercion and permit her neutrality to be violated for the strategical convenience of Germany. Russia manifestly could not accept humiliation. War could be prevented only if Austria modified her demands. Germany not only refused to join with the rest of the Powers and use her good offices with Austria ; she deliberately prevented Austria from giving way, destroying the last chance of peace by herself declaring war upon Russia.

Then the Kaiser discovered, to his extreme annoyance, that statesmen outside of Germany were capable of displaying an unexpected regard for scraps of paper and obligations of honour.

Throughout the reign of William II the policy of the German Government has obviously been the personal policy of the Kaiser. There has been no question, as there was with his grandfather, of a great minister persuading him reluctantly to follow paths which he would not have chosen for himself. On the contrary,

every minister who has scrupled or declined or failed to carry out his master's views, or has in any way crossed his wishes, has committed political suicide. That is not to say that William has not permitted himself all unconsciously to be led by flatterers who have carefully misrepresented facts in order that the ruler's vanity might be made the instrument of their own desires. This much at least is clear, that the Kaiser began with an inordinate conception of the power and mission of Germany and the German Kaiser; a conviction that the Imperial sword was the sword of God, which, in course of time, translated itself into the new creed that the Almighty is the Kaiser's minister. At any rate the fundamental conception was that Germany had some sort of divine right to dominate the world, to stand to the rest of the nations and peoples as the Kaiser himself stood to his own immediate subjects. It followed that anything which furthered this ascendancy was necessarily good, anything which checked it was necessarily evil. It became the criterion of good and evil. This is a view of international morality which is hardly veiled in the academic teaching of Treitschke and in the pronouncements of Bernhardi. But it cannot be insisted upon in its nakedness to a people which, however "enlightened" it may be, is still the people which once gave birth to Martin Luther; and the Kaiser has always found it necessary—and not at all difficult—to persuade his people that he is the least aggressive of men, and that any appearance of aggression must be attributed entirely to the hypocritical craft of treacherous foes. The Kaiser's greatest and tragical triumph lies in this, that to-day the bulk of the German nation is probably honestly convinced that William in 1914, like Frederick in 1856, drew the sword only to save the German nation from destruction at the hands of unscrupulous and wanton enemies, of whom the most unscrupulous and the most wanton is Great Britain.

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Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & CO.

Edinburgh & London